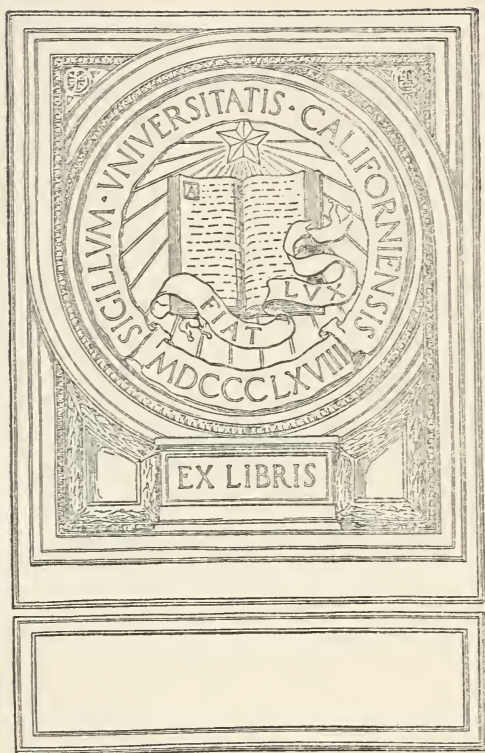


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THE HISTORY OF THE

REIGN OF KING CHARLES THE FIRST

BY JOHN BURNET

LONDON

1693

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in the Strand

GEOFFREY MONCTON:

OR, THE

FAITHLESS GUARDIAN.

BY

SUSANNA MOODIE,

AUTHOR OF

"ROUGHING IT IN THE BUSH," "MARK HURDLESTONE," "LIFE IN THE CLEARINGS,"
"FLORA LYNDAY," "MATRIMONIAL SPECULATIONS," ETC., ETC.

What—dost thou think I'll bend to thee?

The free in soul are ever free;

Nor force, nor poverty can bind

The subtle will—the thinking mind.



NEW YORK:

DE WITT & DAVENPORT, PUBLISHERS,

160 & 162 NASSAU STREET.

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TO
JOHN LOVELL, Esq.,
OF MONTREAL,

WHO WAS ONE OF THE FIRST AND MOST SUCCESSFUL
PIONEERS IN ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL LITERATURE IN THE
CANADIAN COLONIES,

THIS VOLUME,
WHICH OWES ITS EXISTENCE TO HIS GENEROUS CARE,

Is respectfully Dedicated,
BY HIS GRATEFUL AND OBLIGED FRIEND,

SUSANNA MOODIE.

Belleville, Upper Canada.

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THE MONCTONS.

CHAPTER I.

MY GRANDFATHER AND HIS SONS.

THERE was a time—a good old time—when men of rank and fortune were not ashamed of their poor relations ; affording the protection of their name and influence to the lower shoots of the great family tree, that, springing from the same root, expected to derive support and nourishment from the main stem.

That time is well-nigh gone for ever ; kindred love and hospitality have decreased with the increase of modern luxury and exclusiveness, and the sacred ties of consanguinity are now regarded with indifference—or if recognized, it is only with those who move in the same charmed circle, and who make a respectable appearance in the world—then, and then only—are their names pronounced with reverence, and their relationship considered an honor.

It is amusing to watch from a distance, the eagerness with which some people assert their claims to relationship with wealthy and titled families, and the intrigue and manœuvring it

calls forth in these fortunate individuals, in order to disclaim the boasted connexion.

It was my fate for many years to eat the bitter bread of dependence, as one of those despised and insulted domestic annoyances—*A Poor Relation*.

My grandfather, Geoffrey Moncton, whose name I bear, was the youngest son of a wealthy Yorkshire Baronet, whose hopes and affections entirely centered in his first-born—what became of the junior scions of the family-tree was to him a matter of secondary consideration. My grandfather, however, had to be provided for in a manner becoming the son of a gentleman, and on his leaving college, Sir Robert offered to purchase him a commission in the army.

My grandfather was a lad of peaceable habits, and had a mortal antipathy to fighting. He refused point blank to be a soldier. The Navy offered the same cause for objection, strengthened by a natural aversion to the water, which made him decline going to sea.

What was to be done with the incorrigible youth? Sir Robert flew into a passion—called him a coward—a disgrace to the name of Moncton.

My grandfather, who was a philosopher in his way, pleaded guilty to the first charge. From his cradle he had carefully avoided scenes of strife and violence, had been a quiet, industrious boy at school, a sober plodding student at college, minding his own business, and troubling himself very little with the affairs of others. The sight of blood made him sick; he hated the smell of gunpowder, and would make any sacrifice of time and trouble rather than come to blows. He now listened to the long catalogue of his demerits, which his angry progenitor poured forth against him, with such stoical indifference, that it nearly drew upon him the corporeal punishment which at all times he so much dreaded.

Sir Robert, at length named the Church, as the profession

best suited to a young man of his peaceable disposition, and flew into a fresh paroxysm of rage, when the obstinate fellow positively refused to be a parson.

"He had a horror," he said, "of making a mere profession of so sacred a calling. Besides, he had an awkward impediment in his speech, and he did not mean to stand up in a pulpit to expose his infirmity to the ridicule of others."

Honor to my grandfather. He did not want for mental courage, though Sir Robert, in the plenitude of his wisdom, had thought fit to brand him as a coward.

The bar was next proposed for his consideration, but the lad replied firmly, "I don't mean to be a lawyer."

"Your reasons, sir?" cried Sir Robert in a tone which seemed to forbid a liberty of choice.

"I have neither talent nor inclination for the profession."

"And pray, sir, what have you talent or inclination for?"

"A merchant,"—returned Geoffrey calmly and decidedly, without appearing to notice his aristocratic sire's look of withering contempt. "I have no wish to be a poor gentleman. Place me in my Uncle Drury's counting-house, and I will work hard and become an independent man."

Now this Uncle Drury was brother to the late Lady Moncton, who had been married by the worthy Baronet for her wealth. He was one of Sir Robert's horrors—one of those *rich*, vulgar connections which are not so easily shaken off, and whose identity is with great difficulty denied to the world. Sir Robert vowed, that if the perverse lad persisted in his grovelling choice, though he had but two sons, he would discard him altogether.

Obstinacy is a family failing of the Monctons. My grandfather, wisely or unwisely, as circumstances should afterwards determine, remained firm to his purpose. Sir Robert realized his threat; the father and son parted in anger, and from that hour, the latter was looked upon as an alien to the old family stock; which he was considered to have disgraced.

Geoffrey, however, succeeded in carrying out his great life object. He toiled on with indefatigable industry, and soon became rich. He had singular talents for acquiring wealth, and they were not suffered to remain idle. The few pounds with which he commenced his mercantile career, soon multiplied into thousands, and tens of thousands; and there is no knowing what an immense fortune he might have realized, had not death cut short his speculations at an early period of his life.

He had married uncle Drury's only daughter, a few years after he became partner in the firm, by whom he had two sons, Edward and Robert, to both of whom he bequeathed an excellent property.

Edward, the eldest, my father, had been educated to fill the mercantile situation, now vacant by its proprietor's death, which was an ample fortune in itself, if conducted with prudence and regularity.

Robert had been early placed in the office of a lawyer of eminence, and was considered a youth of great talents and promise. Their mother had been dead for some years, and of her little is known in the annals of the family. When speculating upon the subject, I have imagined her to have been a plain, quiet, matter-of-fact body, who never did or said anything worth recording.

When a man's position in life is marked out for him by others, and he is left no voice in the matter, in nine cases out of ten, he is totally unfitted by nature and inclination for the post he is called to fill. So it was with my father, Edward Moncton. A person less adapted to fill an important place in the mercantile world, could scarcely have been found. He had a genius for spending, not for making money; and was so easy and credulous that any artful villain might dupe him out of it. Had he been heir to the title and the old family estates, he would have made a first rate country gentleman; as he possessed a fine manly person, was frank and generous, and excelled in all athletic sports.

My Uncle Robert was the very reverse of my father—stern, shrewd and secretive ; no one could see more of his mind than he was willing to show ; and, like my grandfather, he had a great love for money, and a natural talent for acquiring it. An old servant of my grandfather's, Nicholas Banks by name, used jocosely to say of him : “ Had master Robert been born a beggar, he would have converted his ragged wrap-rascal into a velvet gown. The art of making money was born in him.”

Uncle Robert was very successful in his profession—and such is the respect that men of common minds pay to wealth for its own sake, that my uncle was as much courted by persons of his class, as if he had been Lord Chancellor of England. He was called the *honest lawyer*—wherefore, I never could determine, except that he was the *rich lawyer* ; and people could not imagine that the envied possessor of five thousand per annum, could have any inducement to play the rogue, or cheat his clients.

The dependent slave who was chained all day to the desk, in Robert Moncton's office, knew him to be a dishonest man. But his practice daily increased, and his reputation and fortune increased in proportion.

The habits and dispositions of these brothers were so different, so utterly opposed to each other, that it was difficult to reconcile the mind to the fact that they were so closely related.

My uncle had a subtle knowledge of character, which was rendered more acute by his long acquaintance with the world ; and he did not always turn it to a righteous account. My father was a babe in these matters—a cunning child might deceive him ; while my uncle had a knack of saving without appearing parsimonious, my father had an unfortunate habit of frittering his money away upon trifles. You would have imagined that the one had discovered the secret of the philosopher's stone ; and that the other had ruined himself in endeavoring to find it out. The one was economical from choice, the other

extravagant from the mere love of spending. My uncle married a rich merchant's daughter, for her money. My father ran off with a poor curate's penniless girl, for love. My father neglected his business and became poor. In the hope of redeeming his fortune he frequented the turf and the gambling-table ; and died broken-hearted and insolvent in the prime of manhood ; leaving his widow and her orphan boy to the protection and guardianship of the brother, who had drudged all his life to become a millionaire.

My dear mother only survived her handsome, reckless husband, six short months ; and, bereaved of both my natural protectors, I was doomed at the early age of eight years to drink the bitter cup of poverty and dependence, to its very dregs.

CHAPTER II.

MY MOTHER'S FUNERAL.

I NEVER saw my Uncle Robert Moncton until the morning of my mother's funeral ; and the impression that first interview made upon my young heart will never be forgotten. It cast the first dark shadow upon the sunny dial of my life, and for many painful years my days and hours were numbered beneath its gloomy influence.

It was a chill, murky November day, such a day as London or its immediate vicinity can alone produce. The rain fell slowly and steadily to the ground ; and trickled from the window-frames in one continuous stream. A thick mist hung upon the panes of glass like a gauze veil, intersected by innumerable channels of water, that looked like a pattern of open work left in the dingy material. The shutters of our once

populous parlor were half-closed ; and admitted into the large, deserted apartment, only a portion of this obscure light. The hearse destined to convey the remains of my dear mother to their last, long resting-place, was drawn up at the door. I saw it looming through the fog, with its tall, black shadowy plumes, like some ghostly and monstrous thing. A hitherto unknown feeling of dread stole over me. My life had been all sunshine up to the present moment—the sight of that mournful funeral array swept like a dark cloud over the smiling sky, blotting out all that was bright and beautiful from my eyes and heart. I screamed in terror and despair, and hid my face in the lap of my old nurse to shut out the frightful vision, and shed torrents of tears.

The good woman tried to soothe me while she adjusted my black dress, as I was to form one in that doleful procession as chief mourner—I was my mother's only child. The only real mourner there.

The door that led into the next room was partly open. I saw the undertaker's people removing the coffin in order to place it in the hearse. This was a fresh cause for anxiety. I knew that that black, mysterious looking box contained the cold, pale, sleeping form of my mother ; but I could not realize the fact, that the beautiful and beloved being, who had so lately kissed and blessed me, was unconscious of her removal from her home and weeping boy.

“Mamma !—dear mamma !” I cried, struggling violently with nurse. “Let me go, nurse ! those wicked men shall not take away mamma !”

Two gentlemen, attracted by my cries and struggles, entered the room. The foremost was a tall, portly man, whom the world would call handsome. His features were good, and his complexion darkly brilliant ; but there was a haughty, contemptuous expression in his large, prominent, selfish-looking eyes, that sent a chill to my heart. Glittering and glassy, they

sparkled like ice—clear, sarcastic and repelling—and oh, how cold! The glance of that eye made me silent in a moment. It fascinated like the eye of a snake. I continued to shiver and stare at him, as long as its scornful gaze remained riveted upon my face. I felt a kindred feeling springing up in my heart—a feeling of defiance and resistance that would fain return hatred for hatred, scorn for scorn; and never in after life could I meet the searching look of that stern cold eye, without experiencing the same outward abhorrence and inward revulsion.

He took my hand, and turning me round, examined my countenance with critical minuteness, neither moved by my childish indignation nor my tears. “A strong-limbed, straight-made fellow, this. I did not think that Edward could be the father of such an energetic-looking boy. He’s like his grandfather, and if I mistake not, will be just as obstinate and self-sustained.”

“A true Moncton,” returned his companion, a coarse-featured, vulgar-looking man, with a weak, undecided, but otherwise kindly countenance. “You will not be able to bend that young one, to your purpose.”

A bitter smile was the reply, and a fixed stare from those terribly bright eyes.

“Poor child! He’s very unfortunate,” continued the same speaker. “I pity him from my very soul.” He placed his large hand kindly upon my head, and drawing me between his knees held up my face and kissed me with an air of parental tenderness. Touched by the unexpected caress, I clasped my arms about his neck, and hid my face in his bosom. He flung himself into a large chair, and lifted me upon his knee.

“You seem to have taken a fancy to the boy,” said my uncle, in the same sarcastic tone. “Suppose you adopt him as *your* son. I would gladly be rid of him for ever; and would pay well for his change of name and country. Is it a bargain?” and he grasped his companion by the shoulder.

"No. I will not incur the responsibility. I have done too much against the poor child already. Besides, a man with ten children has no need of adopting the child of a stranger. Providence has thrown him into your hands, Robert Moncton ; and whether for good or evil, I beseech you to treat the lad kindly for his father's sake."

"Well, well, I must, I see, make the best of a bad bargain. But, Walters, you could so easily take him with you to America. He has no friends by the mother's side, to make any stir about his disappearance. Under your name his identity will never be recognized, and it would be taking a thorn out of my side."

"To plant it in my own heart. The child must remain with you."

I didn't pay very particular attention to this conversation at the time, but after events recalled it vividly to my recollection.

The undertaker put an end to the conference by informing the gentlemen that "all was ready, and the hearse was about to move forward." My nurse placed me in a mourning coach, beside my uncle and his companion, in order that I might form a part in that dismal procession, to the nearest cemetery. I shall never forget the impression that solemn scene made on my mind. My first ideas of death and decay were formed whilst standing beside my mother's grave. There my heart received its first great life lesson ; and owned its first acquaintanceship with grief—the *ideal* vanished, and the hard, uncompromising *real* took its place.

After the funeral was over, I accompanied my Uncle Robert to his house in Hatton Garden. At the door we parted with Mr. Walters, and many years elapsed, before I saw his face again.

CHAPTER III.

MY AUNT REBECCA.

MRS. MONCTON welcomed the poor orphan with kindness. She was a little, meek-looking woman ; with a sweet voice, and a very pale face. She might have been pretty when young, but my boyish impression was that she was very plain. By the side of her tall, stern partner, she looked the most delicate, diminutive creature in the world ; and her gentle, timid manner made the contrast appear greater than it really was.

"God bless you, my poor child," she said, lifting me up in her arms and wiping the tears from my face. "You are young, indeed, to be left an orphan."

I clasped her neck and sobbed aloud. The sound of her voice reminded me of my mother, and I began to comprehend dimly all I had lost.

"Rebecca," said my uncle, in his deep, clear voice, "you must not spoil the boy. There is no need of this display."

His wife seemed as much under the influence of his eye as myself. She instantly released me from her arms, and quietly placed me in a chair beside the fire, and in the presence of her husband, she took no more notice of me than she would have done of one of the domestic animals about the house. Yet, her eyes rested upon me with motherly kindness, and she silently took care to administer liberally to all my wants ; and when she did speak, it was in such a soft, soothing tone, that I felt that she was my friend, and loved her with my whole heart.

My uncle was a domestic tyrant—cruel, exacting, and as

obstinate as a mule ; yet, she contrived to live with him on friendly terms ; the only creature in the world, I am fully persuaded, who did not hate him. Married, as she had been, for money, and possessing few personal advantages, it was wonderful the influence she had over him in her quiet way. She never resisted his authority, however harshly enforced ; and often stood between him and his victims, diverting his resentment without appearing to oppose his will. If there existed in his frigid breast one sentiment of kindness for any human creature, I think it was for her.

With women he was no favorite. He had no respect for the sex, and I query whether he was ever in love in his life. If he had ever owned the tender passion, it must have been in very early youth, before his heart got hardened and iced in the world. My aunt seemed necessary to his comfort, his convenience, his vanity ; however he might be disliked by others, he was certain of her fidelity and attachment. His respect for her was the one bright spot in his character, and even that was tarnished by a refined system of selfishness.

The only comfort I enjoyed during my cheerless childhood, I derived from her silent attention to my wants and wishes, which she gratified as far as she dared, without incurring the jealous displeasure of her exacting husband.

In private, Mrs. Moncton always treated me as her own child. She unlocked the fountains of natural affection, which my uncle's harshness had sealed, and love gushed forth. I dearly loved her, and longed to call her mother ; but she forbade all outward demonstration of my attachment, which she assured me would not only be very offensive to Mr. Moncton, but would draw down his displeasure upon us both.

The hours I spent with my good aunt were few ; I only saw her at meals, and on the Sabbath day, when I accompanied her to church, and spent the whole day with her and her only son—a cross, peevish boy, some four years older than myself—

but of him anon. During the winter, she alway sent for me into the parlor, during the dark hour between dinner and tea, when I recited to her the lessons I had learned with my cousin's tutor during the day. My uncle was always absent at that hour, and these were precious moments to the young heart, that knew no companionship, and pined for affection and sympathy.

My worthy aunt! it is with heartfelt gratitude I pay this slight tribute to your memory. But for your gentle love and kind teachings, I might have become as cold and tyrannical as your harsh lord—as selfish and unfeeling as your unnatural son.

How I delighted to sit by your side, in the warm, red light of the cheerful fire, in that large, dusky room, and hold your small white hand in mine, while I recounted to you all the beautiful and shadowy reminiscences of my happy infancy—to watch the pensive smile steal over your lips, as I described the garden in which I played, the dear little white bed in which I slept, and where my own dear mother nightly knelt beside me, to hear me repeat my simple prayers and hymns, before she kissed and blessed me, and left me to the protecting care of the great Father in Heaven.

“Ah!” I exclaimed one evening, while sitting at my aunt's feet, “why did she die and leave me for ever? I am nobody's child. Other little boys have kind mothers to love them, but I am alone in the world. Aunt, let me be your boy—your own dear little boy, and I will love you almost as well as I did my poor mamma!”

The good woman caught me to her heart, tears were streaming down her kind, benevolent face, she kissed me passionately, as she sobbed out,

“Geoffrey, you will never know how much I love you—more, my poor boy, than I dare own. But rest assured that you shall never want a mother's love while I live.”

Well and conscientiously did she perform her promise. She has long been dead, but time will never efface from my mind

a tender recollection of her kindness. Since I arrived at man's estate, I have knelt beside her grave, and moistened the turf which enfolds that warm, noble heart with grateful tears.

She had, as I before stated, one son—the first born and only survivor of a large family. This boy was a great source of anxiety to his mother ; a sullen, unmanageable, ill-tempered child. Cruel and cowardly, he united with the cold, selfish disposition of the father, a jealous, proud and vindictive spirit peculiarly his own. It was impossible to keep on friendly terms with Theophilus Moncton ; he was always taking affronts, and ever on the alert to dispute and contradict every word or opinion advanced by another. He would take offence at every look and gesture, which he fancied derogatory to his dignity ; and if you refused to speak to him, he considered that you did not pay him proper respect—that you slighted and insulted him.

He was afraid of his father, for whom he entertained little esteem or affection ; and to his gentle mother he was always surly and disobedient ; ridiculing her maternal admonitions, and thwarting and opposing her commands, because he knew that his opposition pained and annoyed her.

Me—he hated ; and not only told me so to my face, both in public and private, but encouraged the servants to treat me with insolence and neglect. This class of individuals are seldom actuated by high and generous motives ; and anxious to court the favor of their wealthy master's heir, they soon found that the best way to worm themselves into his good graces, was to treat me with disrespect. The taunts and blows of my tyrannical cousin, though hard to bear, never wounded me so keenly as the sneers and whispered remarks of these worldly, low-bred domestics. Their conduct clenched the iron of dependence into my very soul.

It was vain for my aunt to remonstrate with her son on his ungenerous conduct ; her authority with him was a mere cipher, he had his father upon his side, and for my aunt's sake, I forbore to complain.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TUTOR.

MY uncle did not send us to school, but engaged a young man of mean birth, but good classical attainments, to act in the capacity of tutor to his son, and as an act of especial favor, which fact was duly impressed upon me from day to day, I was allowed the benefit of his instructions.

Mr. Jones, though a good practical teacher, was a weak, mean creature, possessing the very soul of a sneak. He soon discovered that the best way to please his elder pupil was to neglect and treat me ill. He had been engaged on a very moderate salary to teach *one* lad, and he was greatly annoyed when Mr. Moncton introduced me into his presence, coldly remarking, "that I was an orphan son of his brother—a lad thrown upon his charity, and it would add very little to Mr. Jones's labors to associate me with Theophilus in his studies."

Mr. Jones was poor and friendless, and had to make his own way in the world. He dared not resent the imposition, for fear of losing his situation, and while outwardly he cheerfully acquiesced in Mr. Moncton's proposition, he conceived a violent prejudice against me, as being the cause of it.

He was a spiteful, irritable, narrow-minded man ; and I soon found that any attempt to win his regard, or conciliate him, was futile : he had made up his mind to dislike me, and he did so with a hearty good will that no attention or assiduity on my part could overcome.

Theophilus, who, like his father, professed a great insight into character, read that of his instructor at a glance; and despis-

ed him accordingly. But Theophilus was vain and fond of admiration, and could not exist without satellites to move around him, and render him their homage as to a superior luminary. He was a magnificent pay-master to his sneaks ; and bound them to him with the strongest of all ties—his purse strings.

Mr. Moncton, always allowed this lad a handsome sum monthly for his own private expenses ; and fond as he was of money, he never inquired of the haughty arrogant boy, the manner in which he disposed of his pocket money. He might save or spend it as inclination prompted—he considered it a necessary outlay to give his son weight and influence with others ; and never troubled himself about it again.

Theophilus soon won over Mr. Jones to his interest, by a few judicious presents ; while he fostered his dislike to me, by informing him of circumstances regarding my birth and family, with which I never became acquainted until some years afterwards. At this distance of time, I can almost forgive Mr. Jones, for the indifference and contempt he felt for his junior pupil.

Influenced by these feelings, he taught me as little as he could ; but I had a thirst for knowledge, and he could not hinder me from listening and profiting by his instructions to my cousin. Fortunately for me, Theophilus did not possess either a brilliant or inquiring mind. Learning was very distasteful to him ; and Mr. Jones had to repeat his instructions so often, that it enabled me to learn them by heart. Mr. Jones flattered and coaxed his indolent pupil ; but could not induce him to take any interest in his studies, so that I soon shot far ahead of him, greatly to the annoyance of both master and pupil ; the former doing his best to throw every impediment in my way.

I resented the injustice of this conduct with much warmth, and told him, “that I would learn in spite of him ; I had mastered the first rudiments of Latin and Mathematics, and I could now teach myself all that I wanted to know.”

This boast was rather premature. I found the task of self-

instruction less easy than I anticipated. I was in Mr. Jones's power—and he meanly withheld from me the books necessary to my further advancement.

I now found myself at a stand-still. I threatened Mr. Jones I would complain to my uncle of his unjustifiable conduct.

The idea seemed greatly to amuse him and my cousin—they laughed in my face, and dared me to make the experiment.

I flew to my aunt.

She told me to be patient and conceal my resentment ; and she would supply the books and stationery I required, from her own purse.

I did not like this. I was a blunt straight-forward boy ; and I thought that my aunt was afraid to back me in what I knew to be right. I told her so.

“True, Geoffrey. But in this house it is useless to oppose force to force. Your only safe course is non-resistance.”

“That plan I never can adopt. It is truckling to evil, aunt. No ultimate good can spring from it.”

“But great trouble and pain may be avoided, Geoffrey.”

“Aunt, I will not submit to Mr. Jones's mean tyranny ; I feel myself aggrieved ; I must speak out and have it off my mind. I will go this instant to Mr. Moncton and submit the case to him.”

“Incur his displeasure—no trifle at any time, Geoffrey—and have Theophilus and Mr. Jones laughing at you. They can tell your uncle what story they please : and which is he most likely to believe, your statement or theirs ?”

“He is a clever man. Let them say what they like, it is not so easy to deceive him ; he will judge for himself. He would know that I was in the right, even if he did not choose to say so ; and that would be some satisfaction, although he might take their part.”

My aunt was surprised at my boldness ; she looked me long and earnestly in the face.

"Geoffrey, your argument is the best. Honesty is the right policy, after all. I wish I had the moral courage to act up to it at all times. But, my dear boy, when you are the slave of a violent and deceitful man, your only chance for a quiet life is to fight him with his own weapons."

"Wrong again, aunt," I cried vehemently. "That would make me as bad as him. No, no, that plan would not do for me." I should betray myself every minute, and become contemptible in his eyes and my own. It strikes me, although I am but a boy of twelve, and know little of the world, that the only real chance you have with such men is, to show them that you are not afraid of them. Bullies are all cowards, aunt; they will yield to courage which they feel to be superior to their own. So much I have learnt from the experience of the last four years."

Aunt made no reply; she smiled sadly and kindly upon me, and her tacit approval sent me directly to my uncle. He was in his private office. I knocked gently at the door.

"Come in."

I did so; and there I stood, not a little confused and perplexed before him, with flushed cheeks and a fast-throbbing heart. It was the first complaint I had ever made to him in my life—the first time I had ever dared to enter his *sanctum sanctorum*; and I remained tongue-tied upon the threshold, without knowing how to begin. I thought he would have looked me down. I felt the blood receding from my face beneath his cold gaze, as he said—

"Geoffrey, what do you want here?"

"I came, sir," I at last faltered out, "to make a complaint against Mr. Jones."

"I never listen to complaints brought by a pupil against his teacher," he cried, in a voice that made me recoil over the doorstep. "Begone, sir! If you come into my presence again on such an errand, I will spurn you from the room."

This speech, meant to intimidate me, restored my courage. I felt the hot blood rush to my face in a fiery flood.

"Hear me, sir. Did not you place me under his care in order that I might learn?"

"And you refuse to do so?"

"No, sir : the reverse is the case : he refuses to teach me, and deprives me of my books, so that I cannot teach myself."

"A very *probable* tale," sneered Mr. Moncton ; then rising from the table at which he was seated, he cried out hastily, "Is Mr. Jones in the study?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, my new client, come along with me. I will soon learn the truth of your case."

He clutched me by the arm, which he grasped so tightly that I could scarcely resist a cry of pain, and hurried me out. In the study we found Theophilus and Mr. Jones : the one lounging on two chairs, the other smoking a cigar and reading a novel. Mr. Moncton stood for a moment in the door-way, regarding the pair with his peculiar glance.

"Gentlemen, you seem *pleasantly* and *profitably* employed!"

"Our morning tasks are concluded," said Theophilus, returning the stare of scrutiny with a steady lie. "'Too much work would make Jack a dull boy.'"

His father smiled grimly. How well he understood the character of his son.

"Here is a lad, Mr. Jones, who complains that you not only refuse to teach him, but deprive him of his books."

"He tells the truth, sir," returned that worthy, casting upon me a spiteful, sidelong glance, which seemed to say more eloquently than words, "You shall see, master Geoffrey, what you'll get by tale bearing. I'll match you yet." "I have withheld his books, and refused my instructions for the past week, as a punishment for his insolent and disrespectful

conduct to your son and me ; to say nothing of his impertinent speeches regarding *you*, sir, who are his guardian and benefactor."

"Do you hear that—sir!" said my uncle, giving me a violent blow on my cheek, and flinging me from him. "When next you come to me with such tales, you shall not leave your bed for a week."

I sprang from the floor, where his blow had sent me ; and stood erect before him. It was a pigmy confronting a giant ; but my blood was boiling. I had lost all control over myself. "It is a lie !" I cried, shaking my fist at Mr. Jones. "A monstrous falsehood ! He knows it is. Theophilus knows it is. I have been falsely accused and unjustly punished ; I will remember that blow to my dying day. I will never forget nor forgive it."

"And who cares, my hero, for your impotent rage?" My uncle seized me by my thick curling hair, and turned round my face, hot with passion and streaming with tears of rage, to the gaze of my sneering enemies. "I will make you know, that you are in my house and in my power—and you *shall* submit to my authority, and the authority of those I choose to place over you."

I struggled desperately in his herculean grasp in order to free myself. He laughed at my impotent rage and then threw me on the floor—and this time, I was quiet enough.

When I recovered my senses, I found myself lying upon the bed in the garret, allotted to my use. My aunt was sitting beside me, bathing my temples with vinegar and water. "Oh, aunt," I sighed, closing my eyes, "I wish I were dead !"

"Hush, Geoffrey. You brought this on yourself. I told you how it would be."

"It was so unjust," I replied with bitterness.

"And you were so rash. You will be wiser another time."

"When I am as wicked as my persecutors."

"No need of quoting others, my son, while you suffer such vio-

lent passions to master you. Listen to me, my child. I have known your uncle for years. Have seen him in his darkest and stormiest moods ; and contrived to live peaceably with him. Nay, he respects me more than he does any one else in the world. But I never *opposed his will*. He is not a man to be trifled with—tears and complaints are useless. You cannot touch his heart. He *will* be obeyed. Left to himself, he may become your friend, and even treat you with a certain degree of kindness and consideration. But if you anger him, he never forgives, and can be a dreadful enemy. If you love me, Geoffrey, follow my advice and submit to his authority with a good grace.”

“I will try not to hate him for your dear sake. I can promise no more.” I kissed her hand and fell back exhausted on my pillow. My head ached dreadfully from the ill-treatment I had received ; and wounded pride made my heart very sore. It was only on her account that I could control the deadly and revengeful feelings I cherished against him. Theophilus and Mr. Jones, I considered beneath contempt.

CHAPTER V.

A CHANGE IN MY PROSPECTS.

I WAS surprised at receiving a message from Mr. Moncton, the next day, to attend him in his private office. I went to him in fear and trembling. I was ill, nervous and dispirited, and cared very little as to what in future might become of me.

I found him all smiles and affability. “Geoffrey,” he said, holding out his hand, as I entered, “I trust you have received

a useful lesson. You will be wise to lay it to heart. Mr. Jones tells me that you write a good bold hand. Give me a specimen of it. Sit down at the table, and direct that letter to Messieurs Hanbury and Company, Liverpool."

I did as I was commanded, but my hand trembled with excitement : I found some difficulty in steadying the pen. He took the letter and looked at it carefully, muttering as he did so—

"How like my father's hand. Aye, and how like in obstinacy of purpose ; more like him in every respect than his own sons." Then turning to me, who was lost in wonder at this sudden change in his manner towards me, he said, "This is well ; you write a fair, legible hand for a boy. I want a lad in my office to copy writs and other law papers. I think you will just do for that purpose. If you are diligent and industrious, after two years' trial, I will article you to myself. How old are you ?"

"Thirteen, next August."

"It's young ; but you are tall and manly for your age. You and Theophilus are never likely to agree ; it is best for you to be apart. You have no fortune of your own. I will give you a profession, and make an independent man of you, if you will try for the future to be a docile and obedient boy."

I promised to do my best. He then bade me follow him, and leading the way through a narrow arched passage, he introduced me into the public office, where the large business in which he was engaged was carried on. Though I had been four years in the house, I had never seen the inside of this office before. It was a spacious, dark, dirty, apartment, lighted by high, narrow windows of ground glass ; so that no time could be wasted by the junior clerks in looking out into the street. Several pale, melancholy men were seated at desks, hard at work. You heard nothing but the rapid scratching of their pens against the parchment and paper on which they were employed. When Mr.

Moncton entered the office, a short, stout, middle-aged man swung himself round on his high stool and fronted us ; but the moment he recognized his superior, he rose respectfully to receive him.

Mr. Moncton took him apart, and they entered into a deep and earnest conversation : of which, I am certain, from the significant glances which, from time to time, they directed towards me, I formed the principal topic.

At length the conference was over, and my uncle left the office without giving me a parting word or glance. When he was fairly out of hearing, all the clerks gathered round me.

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Moncton's nephew," was the short man's reply to the eager questioners.

"Is he sent here to be a spy?"

"To learn the profession."

"*That babe!* Is the man mad. It will kill the child to chain him to the desk all day."

"Poor fellow ; he is the orphan son of his brother," said another. "I have seen him at church with Mrs. Moncton."

"Well, Robert Moncton is a hard man," said a third.

"Hush, gentlemen," interposed Mr. Bassett, the senior clerk. "It is not right to make such remarks in the lad's hearing. Mr. Moncton, doubtless, does for the best. Come, my little fellow, you and I must be good friends. Your uncle has placed you under my charge, to initiate you into all the mysteries of the law. I have no doubt we shall get on famously together. But you must be diligent and work hard. Your uncle hates idlers ; he is a strict master, but one of the ablest lawyers in London. Let me tell you, that to be articled to him is a fortune in itself."

A far-off, indistinct hope of freedom through this channel, presented itself to my bewildered mind. I thanked Mr. Bassett warmly for his proffered aid, and told him that I would do my best to deserve his good opinion.

From that day, I became an office drudge, condemned to copy the same unintelligible, uninteresting law forms, from early morning until late at night. Mr. Bassett, a quiet, methodical, business man, was kind in his own peculiar way. He had a large family, and perhaps felt a paternal sympathy in my early introduction to the labors and cares of life. He often commended my diligence, and mentioned me in very handsome terms to Mr. Moncton ; but from that gentleman I never received a word of praise—weeks and months often passed without his speaking to me. I was even debarred from spending with my dear aunt that blessed twilight hour, which had proved the chief solace of my weary life.

Constant confinement to that close office preyed upon my health and spirits ; I became fretful and irritable, the color left my cheeks, and my eyes looked dull and heavy. The clerks, mostly kind to me, all pitied me, though they dared not openly show their regard. They brought me presents of fruit and sweetmeats, and one who lived in the suburbs used to delight my heart, every now and then, with a rich bouquet of flowers. Their beauty and perfume brought back a glimpse of the old times—dim visions of lawns and gardens, of singing-birds and humming-bees ; of a fair smiling creature who led me by the hand through those bowers of enchantment, and called me her Geoffrey—her darling boy.

When such thoughts came over me, my hand trembled, and I could not see the parchment I was copying through my tears ; but for all that, the sight of the flowers was always inexpressibly dear, and I prized them beyond every other gift.

I had been about eighteen months in the office, when my good Aunt Rebecca died—an event sudden and unexpected by all. I was allowed to see her in her last moments ; to sob out my full heart by her death-bed. Her last words were an earnest request to her husband to be kind to poor Geoffrey, for her sake—she died—and I felt myself alone and friendless in the world.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SORROWS OF DEPENDENCE.

My heart sickens over this dreary portion of my childhood. I have heard it called the happiest season of life. To me it had few joys. It was a gloomy period of mental suffering and bodily fatigue ; of unnatural restraint and painful probation.

The cold, authoritative manner of my uncle, at all times irksome and repelling, after the death of his good wife became almost insupportable ; while the insolence and presumption of his artful son, goaded a free and irascible spirit like mine almost to madness. The moral force of his mother's character, though unappreciated by him, had been some restraint upon his unamiable, tyrannical temper. That restraint was now removed, and Theophilus considered that my dependent situation gave him a lawful right to my services, and had I been a work-house apprentice in his father's house, he could not have given his commands with an air of more pointed insolence. My obstinate resistance to his authority, and my desperate struggles to emancipate myself from his control, produced a constant war of words between us ; and if I appealed to my uncle, I was sure to get the worst of it. He did not exactly encourage his son in this ungenerous line of conduct, but his great maxim was to *divide and rule* ; to exact from all who were dependent upon him, the most uncompromising obedience to his arbitrary will ; and he laughed at my remonstrances, and turned my indignation into ridicule.

I was daily reminded, particularly before strangers, of the

domestic calamities that had made me dependent upon his cold, extorted charity ; while I was reproached with my want of gratitude to a cruel master.

Passion and wounded pride drew from me burning tears. I felt that I was growing fierce and hard like my persecutors, and my conscience, yet tender, deplored the lamentable change. My heart, crushed beneath the sense of injustice and unmerited neglect, was closed against the best feelings of humanity, and I regarded my fellow men with aversion and mistrust.

These bitter and desponding feelings deprived my nights of rest—my days, of hope. When the morning came and I took my stand at the accursed desk, I wished the day gone ; and when night released me from the abhorrent task, and I sought my humble garret, I sat for hours at the open window, brooding over my wrongs.

The moonbeams glittered in the tears that anguish wrung from my upturned eyes. The stars seemed to look down upon me with compassionate earnestness. Sometimes my young spirit, carried away by the intense love I felt for those beautiful eyes of heaven, forgot for awhile the sorrows and cares of life and soared far, far away to seek for sympathy and affection in those unknown regions of light and purity.

I had few opportunities of religious instruction in this truly Godless household. My uncle never attended church when he could avoid the obligation, and then, only to keep up appearances. A religion of the world—in which the heart had no part. There was always a Bible in the office, but it was never used, but in the way of business to administer oaths. Whenever I had a moment's leisure I had turned over the pages with eager and mysterious curiosity, but the knowledge that should have brought peace and comfort, and reconciled me to my dreary lot, not being sought for in the right spirit, added to my present despondency, the dread of future punishment.

Oh, that awful fear of Hell. How it darkened with its

unholy shadow, all that was bright and beautiful in this lower world.

I had yet to learn, that perfect love casteth out fear, that the great Father punishes but to reform, and is ever more willing to save than to condemn. I dared not seek him, lest I should hear the terrible denunciation thundered against the wicked : "Depart from me, ye cursed."

A firm trust in His protecting care would have been a balm for every wound, that festered and rankled at my heart's core. Had the Christian's hope been mine, I should no longer have pined under that dreary sense of utter loneliness, which for many years paralyzed all mental exertions, or nurtured in my breast the stern unforgiving temper which made me regard my persecutors with feelings of determined hate.

Residing in the centre of the busy metropolis, and at an age when the heart sighs for social communion with its fellows, and imagines, with the fond sincerity of inexperienced youth, a friend in every agreeable companion, I was immured among old parchments and dusty records, and seldom permitted to mingle with the guests that frequented my uncle's house, unless my presence was required to sign some official document.

Few persons suspected that the shabbily-dressed silent youth who obeyed Mr. Moncton's imperious mandates was his nephew—the only son of an elder brother—consequently I was treated as nobody by his male visitors, and never noticed at all by the ladies.

This was mortifying enough to a tall lad of eighteen, who already fancied himself a man. Who, though meanly dressed, and sufficiently awkward, had enough of vanity in his composition to imagine that his person would create an interest in his behalf and atone for all other deficiencies, at least in the eyes of the gentler sex—those angels, who seen at a distance, were daily becoming objects of admiration and worship.

Alas ! poor Geoffrey. Thou didst not know in that thy young

day the things pertaining to thy peace. Thou didst not suspect in thy innocence how the black brand of poverty can deform the finest face, and dim the brightest intellect in the eyes of the world.

Among all my petty trials there were none that I felt more keenly than having to wear the cast-off clothes of my cousin. He was some years older, but his frame was slighter and shorter than mine, and his garments did not fit me in any way. The coat'sleeves were short and tight, and the trowsers came half-way up my legs. The figure I cut in these unsuitable garments was so ludicrous that it was a standing joke among the clerks in the office.

"When you step into your cousin's shoes, Geoffrey, we hope they will suit you better than his clothes."

I could have been happy in the coarsest fustian or corderoy garment that I knew was my own. I believe Robert Moncton felt a malicious pleasure in humbling me in the eyes of his people.

My uncle had fulfilled his promise, and I had been articled to him, when I completed my fourteenth year ; and I now eagerly looked forward to my majority, when I should be free to quit his employ, and seek a living in the world.

My time had been so completely engaged in copying law papers, that I had not been able to pay much attention to the higher branches of the profession ; and when night came, and I was at length released from the desk, I was so overpowered by fatigue that I felt no inclination to curtail the blessed hours of sleep by reading dull law books. Yet, upon this all-important knowledge, which I was neglecting, rested my only chance of independence.

My cousin Theophilus was pursuing his studies at Oxford, and rarely visited home, but spent his vacations with some wealthy relatives in Yorkshire. This was a happy time for me ; for of all my many trials his presence was the greatest. Even Mr. Moncton was more civil to me in the absence of his hopeful heir.

Thus time glided on until I was twenty years of age, and full six feet in height, and I could no longer wear the cast-off suits of my cousin. Mr. Moncton, in common decency, was at length obliged to order my clothes of his tailor ; but he took good care that they should be of the coarsest description, and of the most unfashionable cut. The first suit that was made expressly for me, ridiculous as it must appear to my readers, gave me infinite satisfaction. I felt proud and happy of the acquisition.

The afternoon of that memorable day, my uncle sent for me into the drawing-room to witness the transfer of some law papers. His clients were two ladies, young and agreeable. While I was writing from Mr. Moncton's dictation, I perceived, with no small degree of trepidation, that the younger was regarding me with earnest attention ; and in spite of myself my cheeks flushed and my hand trembled. After my part of the business was concluded Mr. Moncton told me to withdraw. As I left the room, I heard Miss Mary Beaumont say, in a low voice to her sister—my uncle having stepped into the adjoining apartment :—

“What a handsome young man. Who is he?”

“Oh, the clerk, of course.”

“He looks a gentleman.”

“A person of no consequence, by his shabby dress and awkward manners.”

I closed the door, and walked hastily away. How I despised the new suit, of which, a few minutes before, I had felt so proud. The remarks of the younger lady tingled in my ears for weeks. She had considered me worth looking at, in spite of my unfashionable garments ; and I blessed her for the amiable condescension, and thought her in return as beautiful as an angel. I never saw her again—but I caught myself scribbling her name on my desk, and I covered many sheets of waste paper with indifferent rhymes in her praise.

This confession may call up a smile on the lip of the reader, and I am content that he should accuse me of vanity. But

these were the first words of commendation that had ever reached my ears from the lips of woman, and though I have since laughed heartily at the deep impression they made on my mind, they produced a beneficial effect at the time, and helped to reconcile me to my lot.

It was about this period, that Mr. Bassett left the office, and went into the profession on his own account. The want of means, and marrying imprudently in early life, had hindered him from entering it sooner. For twenty years he had worked as a clerk, when he was fully qualified to have been the head of the firm. The death of an uncle who left him a small property unchained him from the oar, and as he said, "Made a man of him at last."

Poor little man. I never shall forget his joy when he got that important letter. He sprang from his desk, upsetting the high stool in his haste, and shook hands with us all round, laughing and crying alternately.

He was a great favorite in the office, and we all rejoiced in his good fortune, though I felt sincerely grieved at parting with him. He had been a kind friend to me when I had no friends; and I had spent some quietly happy evenings with him at his humble lodgings, in the company of a very pretty and amiable wife. Going to visit him occasionally, was the only indulgence I had ever been allowed, and these visits were not permitted to be of too frequent recurrence.

He saw how much I was affected at bidding him good-bye.

"Geoffrey," he said, taking me by the hand and drawing me aside—"One word with you before we part. I know your attachment to me is sincere. Believe me, the feeling is reciprocated in its fullest extent. Your uncle is not your friend. Few men act wickedly without a motive. He has his own reasons for treating you as he does. I cannot enter into particulars here. Nor would I, even if time and opportunity warranted, for it would do no good. Keep your eyes open, your head clear—your temper cool, and your tongue silent, and you will

see and learn much without the interference of a second person. I am going to open an office in Nottingham, my native town, and if ever you want a friend in the hour of need, come to Josiah Bassett in the full confidence of affection, and I will help you."

This speech roused all my curiosity. I pressed him eagerly to tell me all he knew respecting me and my uncle, but he refused to satisfy my earnest inquiries.

The departure of Mr. Bassett, which I regarded as a calamity, proved one of the most fortunate events in my life.

His place was supplied by a gentleman of the name of Harrison, who was strongly recommended to Mr. Moncton by his predecessor as an excellent writer, a man well versed in the law, sober and industrious, and in whose integrity he might place the utmost reliance. He had no wish to enter into the profession, but only sought to undertake the management of the office as head clerk.

Mr. Moncton was a man that never associated himself with a partner, and regarded despotic rule as the only one that deserved the name.

When Mr. Harrison was introduced in *propria persona*, he did not seem to realize his employer's expectations—who, from Mr. Bassett's description, had evidently looked for an older and more methodical person, and was disappointed in the young and interesting individual that presented himself. But as he required only a moderate salary for his services, he was engaged on trial for the next three months.

CHAPTER VII.

GEORGE HARRISON.

GEORGE HARRISON was not distinguished by any remarkable talents; or endowed with that aspiring genius that forces its way through every obstacle, and places the possessor above the ordinary mass with whom he is daily forced to associate.

Yet, his was no common character; no every day acquaintance, with whom we may spend a pleasant hour, and care not if we ever meet again in our journey through life.

The moment he entered the office my heart was drawn towards him by an irresistible, mysterious impulse, so that looking upon him I loved him, and felt confident that the friend whom I had ardently wished to obtain for so many hopeless years, was now before me.

This impression was strengthened by the simple, unaffected, frank manner in which he met the advances of the other clerks. There was a charm in his smile, in the rich tones of his deep, mellow voice, that made me anxious to catch the one, and hear the other again, though both were marked by quiet, subdued sadness.

His face, strictly speaking, could not be called handsome; and his general appearance was more remarkable for a refined and gentlemanly demeanor, than for anything particularly striking in form or feature. A good head, fine intelligent hazel eyes, and a profusion of curling dark brown hair, redeemed his countenance from mediocrity; but its careworn, anxious expression,

showed too clearly, that some great life-sorrow, had blighted the early promise of youth and hope.

It was some days before I had an opportunity of becoming better acquainted with him. We were preparing for the spring assizes, and there was work enough in the office to have employed twice the number of hands. Nothing was heard but the scratching of pens upon paper, from early day until midnight.

At last the hurry was over, and we had more leisure to look about us. Mr. Moncton was attending a country circuit, and his watchful eye was no longer upon us. The clerks were absent at dinner; Mr. Harrison and I were alone in the office, which he never left till six, when he returned to his lodgings in Charlotte street to dine; and unless there happened to be a great stress of business which required his presence, we saw him no more that night.

After regarding me for some minutes with an earnest scrutiny which, impulsive creature that I was, almost offended me, he said—

“Am I mistaken, or is your name *really* Moncton?”

“*Really* and truly, Geoffrey Moncton, at your service. What made you doubt the fact?”

“I had always heard that Mr. Robert Moncton had but one son.”

“Surely there is enough of the breed, without your wishing to affiliate me upon him. I flatter myself that we do not in the least resemble each other. And as to the name, I have so little respect for it, for his sake, that I wish some one would leave me a fortune to change it; for, between ourselves, I have small reason to love it. He is my uncle—my father’s younger brother—and I find the relationship near enough.”

This explanation led to a brief sketch of my painful, though uneventful history, to which Mr. Harrison listened with an air of such intense interest that, though it flattered my vanity, not

a little surprised me. When I concluded, he grasped my hand firmly, muttering to himself—

“It is like him—just like him. The infernal scoundrel!”

“What do you know about him?” said I, astonished at the excited state into which my revelations had thrown him.

“Only *too* much,” he responded, with a heavy sigh; and sinking back in his chair, pressed his hands to his head, like one who wished to shut out painful recollections, while I continued to grasp his arm and stare at him in blank amazement. At length, rousing himself, he said with a faint smile,—

“Don’t make big eyes at me, Geoffrey. I cannot tell you all you wish to know. At some other time, and in some other place, I will repay the confidence you have reposed in me, and satisfy your queries; but not here—not in the lion’s den.”

“For heaven’s sake, don’t keep silent now,” I cried. “You have roused my curiosity to such an extravagant pitch, that I shall go mad if you hold your tongue. You *must* speak out.”

“I *must* not, if, by so doing, I ruin your prospects and my own. Be satisfied, Geoffrey, that I am your friend; that henceforth I will regard you as a brother, and do all in my power to lighten and shorten your present bondage.”

“I threw myself by an irrepressible impulse into his arms. He pressed me to his heart; and the generous assurance he gave me of a warm and affectionate sympathy in my destiny, nearly atoned for twenty years of sorrow and degradation. The intense desire I felt to deserve his esteem, made me anxious to cultivate my mind, which I had suffered to lie waste. Harrison kindly offered his aid, and supplied me with books. I now devoted myself with zeal to the task; for the first time I had a motive for exertion; I no longer vegetated; I had a friend, and my real life commenced from that day. I set apart two hours each night for reading and study, and soon felt a keen relish for the employment.

“In these lie your best hope of independence, Geoffrey,” said

my kind friend, laying his hand upon a pile of books, which, for lack of a table, he placed upon the truck bed in my mean garret. Then seating himself beside me on the shabby couch, he proceeded to examine, by the light of a miserable tallow candle, a translation I had been making from the Orations of Cicero. "With your talents, Geoffrey, you need not fear the tyranny of any man. It will be your own fault if you do not rise in the profession you have chosen."

"The choice was none of mine."

"Then be grateful to your uncle for once, in having chosen it for you."

"Do you expect impossibilities?" and I smiled bitterly.

"Not exactly. Yet, Geoffrey, many things that appear at first sight impossible, only require a series of persevering efforts to become both easy and practicable. You might render your unpleasant position with your uncle more tolerable, by yielding to his authority with a better grace. The constant opposition you make to his wishes, is both useless and dangerous. Though you neither love nor respect him, and I should be sorry if you could do either, yet, he is entitled to obedience, and a certain degree of deference as your guardian and master."

"I never can willingly obey him," I cried, angrily, "or bring my mind to submit to his authority."

"In which, I assure you, as a friend, you are wrong. As long as his commands do not interfere with any moral obligation, you are bound to listen to them with respect."

"The man has always been my enemy, and would you have me become a passive instrument in his hands?"

"Certainly, as long as you remain his clerk, and he does not require your aid in any villainous transaction. If his intentions towards you are evil, you cannot frustrate them better than by doing your duty. Believe me, Geoffrey, you have a more dangerous enemy to contend with, one bound to you by nearer ties, who exercises a more pernicious influence over your mind."

"His sordid, selfish, counterpart—his *worthy* son?"

George shook his head.

I looked inquiringly.

"A certain impetuous, willful, wrong-headed boy, ye clept Geoffrey Moncton."

"Pish!" I exclaimed, shrugging my shoulders; "is this your friendship?"

"The best proof I can give you of it."

I walked hastily to and fro, the narrow limits of the chamber, raising, at every step, a cloud of dust from folds of old, yellow parchment and musty rolls of paper, that had accumulated there for the last half century, and lay in a pile upon the floor. I was in no humor to listen to a lecture, particularly when my own faulty temper was to be the principal subject, and form the text. Harrison watched my movements for some time in silence, with a provokingly-amused air; not in the least discouraged by my wayward mood; but evidently ready for another attack.

"Prithee, Geoffrey, leave off raising that cloud of dust, disturbing the evil spirits that have long slumbered in yon forgotten pile of professional rubbish, and sit down quietly and listen to reason."

I felt annoyed, and would not resume my place beside him, but, assuming a very stately air, seated myself opposite to my tormentor on a huge iron chest, which was the only seat, save the bed, in the room; and then, fixing my eyes reproachfully upon him, I sat as stiff as a poker, without relaxing a muscle of my face.

He laughed outright.

"You are displeased with my bluntness, Geoffrey, and I am amused with your dignity. That solemn, proud face would become the Lord Chancellor of England."

"Hold your tongue, you tormenting wretch; I won't be laughed at in this absurd manner. What have I done to deserve such a sermon?"

“ ‘Vanity, vanity, all is vanity, saith the preacher,’ and surely, Geoffrey, your vanity exceeds all other vanity. I hint at a fault, and point it out for correction. You imagine yourself perfection, and are up in arms in a moment. Answer me, seriously : do you ever expect to settle in life ?”

“ I have dared to cherish the forlorn hope.”

“ Forlorn as it is, you are taking the best method to destroy it.”

“ What would you have me do ?”

“ Yield to circumstances.”

“ Become a villain ?” This was said with a very tragic air.

“ May heaven forbid ! I would be sorry to see you so nearly resemble your uncle. But I would have you avoid uselessly offending him ; for, by constantly inflaming his mind to anger, you may ruin your own prospects, and be driven, in desperation, to adopt measures for obtaining a living, scarcely less dishonorable than his own.”

“ Go on,” I cried ; “ it is all very well for you to talk in this philosophical strain ; you have not been educated in the same bitter school with me ; you have not known what it is to writhe beneath the oppressive authority of this cold, unfeeling man ; you cannot understand the nature of my sufferings, or the painful humiliation I must daily endure.”

He took my hand affectionately.

“ Geoffrey, how do you know all this ? Yours is not a profession which allows men to jump at conclusions. What can you tell of my past or present trials. What if I should say, they had been far greater and worse to bear than your own ?”

“ Impossible !”

“ All things that have reference to sorrow and trouble, in this world, are only too possible. But I will have patience with you, my poor friend ; your heart is very sore. The deadly wounds in mine are partially healed ; yet, my experience of life has been bought with bitter tears. The loss of hope, health

and self-respect. I am willing that you should profit by this ; and, having made this confession, will you condescend to hear my lecture to an end ?”

“ Oh, tell me something more about yourself. I would rather listen to your sorrows, than have my faults paraded before me.”

A melancholy smile passed over his face.

“ Geoffrey, what a child you are ! Listen to me. You have suffered this personal dislike to your uncle and his son, to over-top—like some rank weed—every better growth of your mind ; to destroy your moral integrity and mental advantages ; to interfere with your studies, and prevent any beneficial result which might arise from your situation as clerk in this office. Is this wise ?”

I remained obstinately silent.

“ You are lengthening the term of your bondage, and riveting the fetters you are so anxious to break. Does not your uncle know this ? Does he not laugh at your impotent efforts to break his yoke from off your neck ? In one short year your articles will expire, and you will become a free agent. But, with the little knowledge you have gained of your profession, what would liberty do for you ? Would it procure for you a better situation ; establish your claims as a gentleman, or fill an empty purse ?”

“ Let the worst come to the worst—I could work for my bread.”

“ Not such an easy thing as you imagine.”

“ With health, strength and youth on my side, what should hinder me ?”

“ Your uncle’s influence, which is very great. The world does not know him, as we know him. He is considered an upright, honorable man. One word from him would blast your character, and keep you out of every office in London.”

I felt my cheeks grow pale. I had never seen matters in this

light before. Still, I would not yield to the arguments of my friend. The obstinate spirit of the Monctons was in active operation just then, and would not submit to reason.

"There are more ways of earning a living than by following the profession of the law," said I, doggedly.

"To all of which you have an apprenticeship to serve. Think, Geoffrey, of the thousands of respectable young men who are looking for employment in this vast metropolis, and how few are successful ; and then ask yourself, how you, without money, without friends, and with a powerful enemy to crush all your honest endeavors, and render them abortive, are likely to earn your own living."

I was struck speechless, and, for the first time in my life, became aware of my utter inability to extricate myself out of the net of difficulties that surrounded me.

"You are convinced at last. Look me steadily in the face, Geoffrey, and own that you are beaten. Nay, smooth that frowning brow ; it makes you look like Robert Moncton.

"Your profession is a fortune in itself, if you persevere in acquiring it. Be not discouraged by difficulties that beset the path. A poor man's road to independence is always up-hill work. Duty fences the path on either side, and success waves her flag from the summit ; but every step must be trod, often in ragged garments and with bare feet, if we would reach the top."

I pressed George Harrison's hand, silently within my own. He had won a great victory over obstinacy and self-conceit.

From that hour my prospects brightened. I became a new creature, full of hope, activity and trust. My legal studies engaged all my leisure moments. I had no time left to brood over my wrongs. My mind had formed an estimate of its own powers ; the energetic spirit which had been wasted in endless cavils and contradictions—for my temper was faulty and head-strong, and my uncle not always the aggressor—now asserted

its own dignity, and furnished me with the weapon most needed in such petty warfare—self-respect. Harrison had given me a motive for exertion, and I was ashamed of having suffered my mental powers to remain so long inactive. As my mind recovered a healthy tone, my spirits rose in proportion. The thirst for improvement daily acquired new strength, while my industry not only surprised, but drew forth the commendations of my uncle.

“What has become of your churlish, morose temper, Geoffrey?” he said to me one day, at dinner; “why, boy, you are greatly changed of late. From a sulky, impertinent, vindictive lad, you have become an industrious, agreeable, pleasant fellow.”

“It is never too late to mend, uncle,” said I, laughing, though I did not much relish his portrait of what I had been. “My temper I found a greater punishment to myself than to others, so I thought it high time to change it for a better.”

“You were perfectly right. I have a better hope for your future than I once had. I shall be able to make something out of you yet.”

This unlooked-for condescension on the part of Mr. Moncton, softened the hard feelings I had long cherished against him into a more Christian-like endurance of his peculiarities; and the conscientious discharge of my own duty taught me to consider his interests as my own.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNGRATIFIED CURIOSITY.

THERE is a period in every young man's first outset in life, that gives a coloring to his future destiny. It is the time for action, for mental and moral improvement, and the manner in which it is applied or neglected, will decide his character, or leave him weak and vacillating all the days of his life.

If this precious portion of existence is wasted in frivolous amusements, time gets the start of us, and no after-exertion enables us to overtake him in his flight. This important era was mine—and I lost no opportunity of turning it to the best advantage. I worked early and late in the office, and made myself master of the nature of the work that employed my hands. I learned the philosophy of those law forms, which hitherto I had only copied mechanically, and looked upon as a weary task, and I soon reaped the benefit of my increased stock of knowledge. Grave men, in the absence of my uncle, often applied to me for information and advice, which I felt proud and happy in being able to supply.

Thus, I found that in serving my employer faithfully, I conferred the greatest benefit on myself; and the hours devoted to study, while they formed a pleasant recreation from the day labors of the office, were among the happiest and most sinless of my life.

I was seldom admitted into my uncle's drawing-room, and never allowed to mingle with evening parties, which, during the brief visits of Theophilus to his home, were not only frequent, but very brilliant. This I felt as a great hardship. My soli-

tary and companionless youth had deeply imbued my mind with romance. I was fond of castle-building ; I pictured to myself the world as a paradise, and fancied that I was an illustrious actor in scenes of imaginary splendor, which bore no analogy to the dull realities of my present life.

I was a dreamer of wild dreams, and suffered my enthusiasm to get the master of reason, and betray me into a thousand absurdities. My love for poetry and music was excessive. I played upon the flute by ear, and often when alone, dissipated my melancholy thoughts by breathing them into the instrument.

Through this medium, Harrison became an adept at discovering the state of my feelings. "My flute told tales," he said. "It always spoke the language of my heart." Yet from him I had few concealments. He was my friend and bosom counsellor, in whom I reposed the most unreserved confidence. But strange to say, this confidence was not mutual. There was a mystery about George that I could not fathom ; a mental reservation that was tantalizing and inexplicable.

He was a gentleman in education, appearance and manners, and possessed those high and honorable feelings, which if displayed in a peasant, would rank him as one, and which are inseparable from all who really deserve the title. He never spoke to me of his family—never alluded to the events of his past life, or the scenes in which his childhood had been spent. He talked of sorrow and sickness—of chastisements in the school of adversity, in general terms ; but he never revealed the cause of these trials, or why a young man of his attainments was reduced to a situation so far below the station he ought to have held in society.

I was half inclined to quarrel with him for so pertinaciously concealing from me circumstances which I thought I had a right to know ; and in which, when known, I was fully prepared to sympathize. A thousand times I was on the point of remon-

strating with him on this undue reserve, which appeared so foreign to his frank, open nature, but feelings of delicacy restrained me.

What right had *I* to pry into his secrets? My impertinent curiosity might reopen wounds that time had closed. There were, doubtless, good reasons for his withholding the information I coveted.

Yet, I must confess that I had an intense curiosity—a burning desire to know the history of his past life. For many long months my wishes remained ungratified.

At this time I felt an ardent desire to see something more of life, to mingle in the gay scenes of the great world around me. Pride, however, withheld me from accepting the many pressing invitations I daily received from the clerks in the office, to join them in parties of pleasure, to the theatres and other places of public amusement. Mr. Moncton had strictly forbidden me to leave the house of an evening; but as he was often absent of a night, I could easily have evaded his commands; but I scorned to expose to strangers the meanness of my wealthy relative, by confessing that mine was an empty purse; while the thought of enjoying myself at the expense of my generous companions, was not to be tolerated for an instant. If I could not go as a gentleman, and pay my own share of the entertainment, I determined not to go at all; and these resolutions met with the entire approbation of my friend Harrison.

“Wait patiently, Geoffrey, and fortune will pay up the arrears of the long debt she owes you. It is an old and hackneyed saying, ‘That riches alone, cannot confer happiness upon the possessor.’”

“My uncle and cousin are living demonstrations of the truth of the proverb. Mr. Moncton is affluent, and might enjoy all the luxuries that wealth can procure; yet he toils with as much assiduity to increase his riches, as the poorest laborer does to earn bread for his family. He can acquire, but has not the

heart to enjoy—while the bad disposition of Theophilus would render him, under any circumstances, a miserable man. Yet, after all, George, in this bad world, money is power.”

“Only, to a certain extent—to be happy, a man must be good. Religiously—morally—physically. He must bear upon his heart the image of the Prince of Peace, before he can truly value the glorious boon of life.”

“I wish I could see these things in the same calm unprejudiced light,” said I; “but I find it a bitter mortification, after so many years of hard labor, to be without a penny to pay for seeing a raree-show.”

Harrison laughed heartily. “You will perhaps say, that it is easy for me to preach against riches; but like the Fox in the fable, the grapes are sour. But I speak with indifference of the good that Providence has placed beyond my reach. Geoffrey, I was once the envied possessor of wealth, which in my case was productive of much evil.”

“How did you lose such an advantage?” I eagerly cried. “Do tell me something of your past life?”

This was the first allusion he had made to his former circumstances; and I was determined not to let the opportunity pass unnoticed.

He seemed to guess my thoughts. “Are you anxious for a humiliating confession, of vanity, folly and prodigality; well Geoffrey, you shall have it—but mark me—it will only be in general terms—I cannot enter into particulars. I was born poor, and unexpectedly became rich, and like many persons in like circumstances, I was ashamed of my mean origin; and thought, by making a dashing appearance and squandering lavishly my wealth, to induce men to forget my humble birth. The world applauds such madness as long as the money lasts, and for a short period, I had friends and flatterers at will.

“My brief career terminated in ruin and disgrace—wealth that is not acquired by industry, is seldom retained by prudence;

and to those unacquainted with the real value of money, a large sum always appears inexhaustible. So it was with me. I spent, without calculating the cost, and soon lost all. The world now wore a very different aspect. I was deserted by all my gay associates, my most intimate companions passed me in the streets without recognition. I knew that this would be the result of my altered fortunes, yet the reality cut me to the heart.

"These are mortifying lessons, which experience—wisdom's best counsellor—daily teaches us ; and a man must either be very self-conceited, or very insensible, who cannot profit by her valuable instructions. The hour that brought to me the humiliating conviction, that I was a person of no consequence ; that the world could go on very well without me ; that my merry companions would not be one jot less facetious, though I was absent from their jovial parties, was, after all, not the most miserable of my life.

"I woke as from a dream. The scales had fallen from my eyes, I knew myself—and became a wiser and better man—I called all my creditors together, discharged my debts, and found myself free of the world in the most literal sense.

"Good Heavens !" I exclaimed. "How could you bear such a dreadful reverse with such fortitude—such magnanimity ?"

"You give me greater credit than I deserve, Geoffrey—my imprudent conduct merited a severe punishment, and I had sense enough to discern that it was just. After the first shock was over, I felt happier in my poverty than I had ever done during my unmerited prosperity—I had abused the gifts of fortune while they were mine, and I determined to acquire an independence by my own exertions. A friend, whom I had scarcely regarded as such, during my reckless career of folly, came unexpectedly to my assistance, and offered to purchase for me a commission in the army, but I had private reasons for wishing to obtain a situation in this office ; writing a good hand, and having been originally educated for the profession, together with

the recommendation of Mr. Bassett who was related to my friend, procured me the place I now hold."

"And your reasons for coming here?" I cried, burning with curiosity.

"Pardon me, Geoffrey. That is my secret."

He spoke with the calmness of a philosopher, but I saw the tears in his eyes as he turned mechanically to the parchment he was copying, and affected an air of cheerful resignation.

The candid exposure of his past faults and follies raised, rather than sunk him in my estimation; but I was sadly disappointed at the general terms in which they were revealed. I wanted to know every event of his private life, and this abridgment was very tantalizing.

While I was pondering these things in my heart, the pen he had grasped so tightly was flung to some distance, and he raised his fine eyes to my face.

"Thank God, Geoffrey!—I have not, as yet, lost the faculty of feeling—that I can see and deplore the errors of the past. When I think of what I was—what I am—and what I might have been, it brings a cloud over my mind which often dissolves in tears. This is the weakness of human nature. But the years so uselessly wasted rise up in dread array against me, and the flood-gates of the soul are broken up by bitter and remorseful regrets. But see," he cried, dashing the thickening mist from his eyes, and resuming his peculiarly benevolent smile. "The dark cloud has passed, and George is himself again."

"You are happier than I. You can smile through your tears," I cried, regarding his April face with surprise.

"And so would you, Geoffrey, if, like me, you had brought your passions under the subjection of reason."

"It is no easy task, George, to storm a city, when your own subjects defend the walls, and at every attack drive you back with your own weapons, into the trenches. I will, however, commence the attack, by striving to forget that there is a world

beyond these gloomy walls, in whose busy scenes I am forbidden to mingle."

"Valliantly resolved, Geoffrey. But how comes it, that you did not tell me the news this morning?"

"News—what news?"

"Your cousin Theophilus returned last night."

"The devil he did. That's everything but good news to me. But are you sure the news is true?"

"My landlady is sister to Mr. Moncton's housekeeper. I had my information from her. She tells me that the father and son are on very bad terms."

"I have seldom heard Mr. Moncton mention him of late. I wonder we have not seen him in the office. He generally pays us an early visit to show off his fine clothes, and to insult me."

"Talk of his satanic majesty, Geoff. You know the rest. Here comes the heir of the house of Moncton."

"He does not belong to the elder branch," I cried, fiercely. "Poor as I am, I consider myself the head of the house, and one of these days will dispute his right to that title."

"Tush!" said George, resuming his pen, "you are talking sad nonsense. But thereby hangs a tale."

I looked up inquiringly. Harrison was hard at work. I saw a mischievous smile hovering about his lips. He turned his back abruptly to the door, and bent more closely over his parchment, as Theophilus Moncton entered the office equipped for a journey.

CHAPTER IX.

A PORTRAIT.

Two years had passed away since I last beheld my cousin, and during his absence, there had been peace between his father and me. He appeared before me like the evil genius of the house, prepared to renew the old hostility, and I could not meet him with the least show of cordiality and affection.

I am not a good hand at sketching portraits, but the person of my cousin is so fresh in my memory, his image so closely interwoven with all the leading events of my life, that I can scarcely fail in giving a tolerably correct likeness of the original.

He was just about the middle stature, his figure slender and exceedingly well made ; and but for a strong dash of affectation, which marred all that he did and said, his carriage would have been easy and graceful. His head was small and handsomely placed upon his shoulders, his features sharply defined and very prominent. His teeth were dazzlingly white, but so long and narrow that they looked as if they could bite you under the least provocation, which gave a peculiarly sinister and malicious expression to his face—which expression was greatly heightened by the ghastly contortion that was meant for a smile, and which was in constant requisition, in order to show off the said teeth, which Theophilus considered one of his greatest attractions. But my cousin had no personal attractions. There was nothing manly or decided about him. Smooth and insidious where he wished to please, his first appearance to strangers was always

unprepossessing ; and few persons on their first introduction, had any great desire to extend their acquaintance.

He ought to have been fair, for his hair and whiskers were of the palest tint of brown ; but his complexion was grey and muddy, and his large sea-green eyes afforded not the least contrast to the uniform smokiness of his skin. Those cold, selfish, deceitful eyes. His father's in shape and expression, but lacking the dark strength—the stern determined look that at times lighted up Robert Moncton's proud, cruel face.

Much as I disliked the father, he was, in his worst moods, more tolerable to me than his son. Glimpses of his mind would at times flash out through those unnaturally bright eyes ; and betray somewhat of the hell within. But Theophilus was close and dark—a sealed book which no man could open and read. An overweening sense of his own importance was the only trait of his character which lay upon the surface ; and this, his master failing, was revealed by every look and gesture.

A servile flatterer to persons of rank, and insolent and tyrannical to those whom he considered beneath him, he united in his character, the qualifications of both tyrant and slave.

The most brilliant sallies of wit could not produce the least brightening effect upon his saturnine countenance, or the most pathetic burst of eloquence draw the least moisture to his eye, which only became animated when contradicting some well-received opinion, or discussing the merits of an acquaintance, and placing his faults and follies in the most conspicuous light.

He was endowed with excellent practical abilities, possessed a most retentive memory, and a thorough knowledge of the most intricate windings of the human heart. Nothing escaped his observation. It would have been a difficult matter to have made a tool of one, whose suspicions were always wide awake ; who never acted from impulse, or without a motive, and who had a shrewd knack of rendering the passions of others subservient to his own.

He was devoted to sensual pleasures, but the mask he wore so effectually concealed his vicious propensities, that the most cautious parents would have admitted him, without hesitation, into their family circle.

Robert Moncton thought himself master of the mind of his son, and fancied him a mere puppet in his hands; but his cunning was foiled by the superior cunning of Theophilus, and he ultimately became the dupe and victim of the being for whose aggrandizement he did not scruple to commit the worst crimes.

Theophilus was extremely neat in his dress, and from the cravat to the well-polished boot his costume was perfect. An effeminate, solemn-looking dandy outwardly—within, as ferocious and hard a human biped as ever disgraced the name of man.

“Well, Geoff!” he said, condescendingly presenting his hand, “what have you been doing for the last two years?”

“Writing, in the old place,” said I, carelessly.

“A fixture!—ha, ha! ‘A rolling stone,’ they say, ‘gathers no moss.’ How does that agree with your stationary position?”

“It only proves, that all proverbs have two sides to them,” said I. “You roll about the world and scatter the moss that I sit here to help accumulate.”

“What a lucky dog you are,” he said, “to escape so easily from the snares and temptations of this wicked world. While I am tormented with ennui, blue-devils and dyspepsia, you sit still and grow in stature and knowledge. By Jove! you are too big to wear my cast-off suits now. My valet will bless the increase of your outward man, and I don’t think you have at all profited by the circumstance. Where the deuce did you get that eccentric turn-out? It certainly does not remind one of Bond street.”

“Mr. Theophilus!” I cried, reddening with indignation. “Did you come here on purpose to insult me?”

"Sit still, now, like a good lad, and don't fly into heroics and give us a scene. I am too lazy to pick a quarrel with you. What a confounded wet morning. It has disarranged all my plans. I ordered the groom to bring up my mare at eleven. The rain commenced at ten. I think it means to keep on at this rate, all day."

He cast a peevish glance at the dusty ground-glass windows.

"There's no catching a glimpse of heaven through these dim panes. My father's clerks are not called upon to resist the temptation of looking into the streets."

"They might not inappropriately be called the pains and penalties of lawyer's clerks," said I, smothering my anger, as I saw by the motion of Harrison's head, that he was suffering from an agony of suppressed laughter.

"Not a bad idea that. The plan of grinding the glass was suggested by me. An ingenious one, is it not? My father had the good sense to adopt it. It's a pity that his example is not followed by all the lawyers and merchants in London."

In spite of the spattering of Harrison's pen, that told me as plainly as words could have done, that he was highly amused at the scene, I felt irritated at Theophilus joking about a circumstance which, to me, was a great privation and annoyance.

"If *you* had a seat in this office, Mr. Theophilus," said I, laying a strong stress upon the personal pronoun, "you would, I am certain, take good care to keep a peep-hole, well-glazed, for your own convenience."

"If I were in the office," he replied, with one of his sidelong, satirical glances, "I should have too much to do in keeping the clerks at work and in their places, to have much time for looking out of the window. My father would do well to hire an overseer for *idle* hands."

Harrison's tremulous fit increased, while I was burning with indignation, and rose passionately from my seat.

"Geoffrey" — pronounced in an undertone, restrained me

from committing an act of violence. I resumed my stool, muttering audibly between my teeth—

“Contemptible puppy !”

I was quite ready for a quarrel, but Theophilus, contrary to my expectations, did not choose to take any notice of my imprudent speech. Not that he wanted personal courage. Like the wasp he could, when unprovoked, attack others, and sting with tenfold malice when he felt or fancied an affront. His forbearance on the present occasion, I attributed to the very handsome riding-dress in which he had encased his slight and elegant form. A contest with a strong, powerful young fellow like me, might have ended in its demolition.

Slashing his boot with his riding-whip, and glancing carelessly towards the window, he said, with an air of perfect indifference :

“Well, if the rain means to pour in this way all day, it is certain that I cannot prosecute my journey to Dover on horseback. I must take the coach, and leave the groom to follow with the horses.”

“Dover !” I repeated, with an involuntary start, “are you off for France ?”

“Yes” (with a weary yawn); “I shall not return until I have made the tour of Europe, and I just stepped in for a moment to say good bye.”

“*Unusually* kind,” said I, with a sneer.

He remained silent for a few minutes, and seemed slightly embarrassed, as if he found difficulty in bringing out what he had to say.

“Geoffrey, I may be absent several years. It is just possible that we may never meet again.”

“I hope so,” was the response in my heart, while he continued—

“Your time in this office expires when you reach your majority. Our paths in life are very different, and from that period I must insist upon our remaining perfect strangers to each other.”

Before I had time to answer his ungracious speech, he turned upon his heel and left the office, and me literally foaming with passion.

"Thank God he is gone !" cried Harrison. "My dear Geoff, accept my sincere congratulations. It would indeed be a blessing did you never meet again."

"Oh, that he had stayed another minute, that I might have demolished the foul biped of his gay plumes."

"Don't be vindictive."

"I'm so angry—so mortified, George, I can scarcely control myself."

"Nonsense. His departure is a fortunate event for you."

"Of course—the absence of one so actively annoying, must make my bondage more tolerable."

"Listen to me, petulant boy ! There is war in the camp. Theophilus leaves the house under the ban of his father's anger. They have had a desperate quarrel, and he quits London in disgrace ; and if you are not a gainer by this change in the domestic arrangements, my name is not George Harrison."

"Why do you think so ?"

"Because I know more of Robert Moncton than you do. To provoke his son to jealousy, he will take you into favor. If Theophilus has gone too far—he is so revengeful, so unforgiving—he may, probably, make you his heir."

"May God forbid !" cried I, vehemently.

Harrison laughed.

"Gold is too bright to betray the dirty channels through which it flows—and I feel certain, Geoffrey"—

A quick rap at the office door terminated all further colloquy, and I rose to admit the intruder.

Harrison and I generally wrote in an inner room, which opened into the public office ; and a passage led from the apartment we occupied, into Mr. Moncton's private study, in which he generally spent the fore-part of the day, and in which he received persons who came to consult him on particular business.

On opening the door which led into the public office, a woman wrapped closely in a black camblet cloak, glided into the room.

Her face was so completely concealed by the large calash and veil she wore, and, but for the stoop in the shoulders, it would have been difficult at a first glance to have determined her age.

"Is Mr. Moncton at home?" Her voice was harsh and unpleasant; it had a hissing, grating intonation, which was painful to the ear.

The moment the stranger spoke, I saw Harrison start, and turn very pale. He rose hastily from his seat and walked to a case of law-books which stood in a dark recess, and taking down a volume, continued standing with his back towards us, as if intently occupied with its contents.

This circumstance made me regard the woman with more attention. She appeared about sixty years of age. Her face was sharp, her eyes black and snake-like, while her brow was channelled into deep furrows that made you think it almost impossible that she had ever been young or handsome. Her upper lip was unusually short, and seemed to writhe with a perpetual sneer; and in spite of her corrugated brow, long nose, and curved chin, which bore the unmistakable marks of age, her fine teeth gleamed white and ghastly, when she unclosed her fleshless, thin lips. A human creature with a worse, or more sinister aspect, I have seldom, during the course of my life, beheld.

In answer to her inquiry, I informed her that Mr. Moncton was at home, but particularly engaged; and had given orders for no one to be admitted to his study before noon.

With a look of bitter disappointment, she then asked to speak to Mr. Theophilus.

"He has just left for France, and will not return for several years."

"Gone!—and I am too late," she muttered to herself. "If I cannot see the son, I *must* and *will* speak to the father."

"Your business then, was with Mr. Theophilus?" said I, no

longer able to restrain my curiosity, for I was dying to learn something of the strange being whose presence had given my friend Harrison's nerves such a sudden shock.

"Impertinent boy!" she said with evident displeasure. "Who taught you to catechise your elders? Go, and tell your employer that *Dinah North* is here; and *must* see him immediately."

As I passed the dark nook in which Harrison was playing at hide-and-seek, he laid his hand upon my arm, and whispered in French, a language he spoke fluently, and in which he had been giving me lessons for some time, "My happiness is deeply concerned in yon hag's commission. Read well Moncton's countenance, and note down his words, while you deliver her message, and report your observations to me."

I looked up in his face with astonishment. His countenance was livid with excitement and agitation, and his whole frame trembled. Before I could utter a word, he had quitted the office. Amazed and bewildered, I glanced back towards the being who was the cause of this emotion, and whom I now regarded with intense interest.

She had sunk down into Harrison's vacant seat, her elbows supported on her knees, and her head resting between the palms of her hands. Her face completely concealed from observation. "Dinah North," I whispered to myself; "that is a name I never heard before. Who the deuce can she be?" With a flushed cheek and hurried step I hastened to my uncle's study to deliver her message.

I found him alone; he was seated at the table, looking over a long roll of parchment. He was much displeased at the interruption, and reproved me in a stern voice for disobeying his positive orders; and, by way of conciliation, I repeated my errand.

"Tell that woman," he cried, in a voice hoarse with emotion, "that I *will not* see her! nor any one belonging to her."

"The mystery thickens," thought I. "What can all this mean?"

"On re-entering the office, I found the old woman huddled up in her wet clothes, in the same dejected attitude in which I had left her. When I addressed her, she raised her head with a fierce, menacing gesture. She evidently mistook me for Mr. Moncton, and smiled disdainfully on perceiving her error. When I repeated his answer, it was received with a bitter and derisive laugh.

"He will not see me?"

"I have given you my uncle's answer."

"*Uncle!*" she cried, with a repetition of the same horrid laugh.

"By courtesy, I suppose; I was not aware that there was another shoot of that accursed tree."

I gazed upon her like one in a dream. The old woman drew a slip of paper from her bosom, bidding me convey *that* to my *worthy* uncle, and ask him, in her name, "whether he, or his son, *dared* to refuse admittance to the bearer."

I took the billet from her withered hand, and once more proceeded to the study. As I passed through the passage, an irresistible impulse of curiosity induced me to read the paper, which was neatly folded (although unsealed) together, and my eye glanced upon the following words, traced in characters of uncommon beauty and delicacy :

"If Robert Moncton refuses to admit my claims, and to do me justice, I will expose his villainy, and his son's heartless desertion, to the world.

"A. M."

I had scarcely read the mysterious billet than I felt that I had done wrong—had acted basely; that whatever the contents of the paper entrusted to my keeping might be, they were sacred, and I had no right to violate them. I was humbled and abashed in my own eyes, and the riddle appeared as difficult of solution as ever. My uncle's voice sounded as ominously in my ears as the stroke of a death-bell, as he called me

sharply by name. Hastily re-folding the note, I went into his study, and placed it on the table before him, with an averted glance and trembling hand. I dreaded lest his keen, clear eye should read guilt in my conscious face. Fortunately for me, he was too much agitated himself to notice my confusion. He eagerly clutched the paper, and his aspect grew dark as he perused it.

"Geoffrey," he said, and his voice, generally so clear and passionless, sunk into a choking whisper, "Is that woman gone?"

"No, uncle, she is still there, and dares you to refuse her admittance."

I had thought Robert Moncton icy and immovable—that his blood never flowed like the blood of other men. I had deceived myself. Beneath the snow-capped mountain, the volcano conceals its hottest fires. My uncle's cold exterior was but the icy crust that hid the fierce passions that burnt within his breast. He forgot my presence in the excitement of the moment, and that stern, unfeeling eye blazed with lurid fire.

"Fool!—madman—insane idiot!" he cried, tearing the note to pieces, and trampling on the fragments in his ungovernable rage; "how have you marred your own fortune, destroyed your best hopes, and annihilated all my plans for your future advancement!"

Suddenly he became conscious of my presence, and glancing at me with his usual iron gravity, said, with an expression of haughty indifference, as if my opinion of his extraordinary conduct was a matter of no importance,

"Geoffrey, go and tell that mad-woman—— But no. I will go myself."

He advanced to the door, seemed again irresolute, and finally bade me show her into the study. Dinah North rose with alacrity to obey the summons, and for a person of her years, seemed to possess great activity of mind and body. I felt a secret

loathing for the hag, and pitied my uncle the unpleasant conference which I was certain awaited him.

Mr. Moncton had resumed his seat in his large study chair, and he rose with such calm dignity to receive his unwelcome visitor, that his late agitation appeared a delusion of my own heated imagination.

Curiosity was one of my besetting sins. Ah, how I longed to know the substance of their discourse; for I felt a mysterious presentiment that in some way or another, my future destiny was connected with this stranger. I recalled the distress of Harrison, the dark hints he had thrown out respecting me, and his evident knowledge, not only of the old woman, but of the purport of her visit.

I was tortured with conjectures. I lingered in the passage. I applied my ear to the key-hole; but the conversation was carried on in too low a tone for me even to distinguish a solitary monosyllable; and ashamed of acting the part of a spy, I stole back with noiseless steps to my place in the office. I found George at his desk; his face was very pale, and I thought I could perceive the trace of tears on his swollen eye-lids. For some time he wrote on in silence, without asking a word about the secret that I was burning to tell. I was the first to speak and lead him to the subject.

“Dear George, do you know that horrible old woman?”

“Too well; she is my grandmother, and nursed me in my infancy.”

“Then, what made you so anxious to avoid a recognition?”

“I did not want her to know that I was living. She believes me dead: nay more—” he continued, lowering his voice to a whisper, “she thinks she murdered me. His lips quivered as he murmured, in half-smothered tones: “And she—the beautiful, the lost one—what will become of her?”

“Oh, Harrison!” I cried, “do speak out; nor torture me with these dark hints. If you are a true friend, give me your

whole confidence, nor let your silence give rise to painful conjectures and doubts. I have no concealments from you. Such mental reservation on your part is every thing but kind."

"I frankly acknowledge that you have just cause to suspect me," said George, with his usual sad, winning smile. "But this is not a safe place to discuss matters of vital interest to us both—matters which involve life and death. I trust to clear up the mystery one of these days, and for that purpose I am here. But tell me : how did Moncton receive this woman—this Dinah North?"

I related the scene, without omitting the dishonorable part I had acted in it. When I repeated the contents of the note, his calm face crimsoned with passion, his eyes flashed, and his lips quivered with indignation.

"Yes, I thought it would come to that ; unhappy, miserable Alice ! how could you bestow the affections of a warm, true heart on a despicable wretch like Theophilus Moncton. The old fiend's ambition and this fatal passion have been your ruin."

For some time he remained with his face bowed upon his hands ; at length, raising his head, and turning to me with great animation, he asked if I knew any of my father's relations, besides Robert Moncton and his son ?

"I was not aware that I had any other relatives."

"They are by no means a prolific race, Geoffrey. And has your insatiable curiosity never led you to make the inquiry?"

"I dared not ask my uncle. My aunt told me that, but for them, I should be alone in the world.—"

"It was a subject never discussed before me," I continued, after a long pause, in which George seemed busy with his own thoughts. "I understood that my uncle had only one brother."

"True," said George, "but he has a cousin ; a man of great wealth and consequence. Did you never hear Theophilus mention Sir Alexander Moncton?"

"Never."

"Nor to whom his long visits in Yorkshire were made?"

"How should I? No confidence existed between us. I was indifferent to all his movements; not imagining that they could, in any degree, interest me."

"I begin to see my way through this tangled maze," returned George, musingly. "I now understand the secluded manner in which you have been brought up; and their reasons for keeping you a prisoner within these walls. They have an important game to play, in which they do not want you to act a conspicuous part. I can whisper a secret into your ears well worth the knowing—ay, and the keeping, too. Geoffrey Moncton, you are this Sir Alexander's *heir*!"

A sudden thrill shot through my whole frame. It was not pleasure, for at that moment I felt sad enough—nor hope, for I had long accustomed myself to look only on the dark side of the picture. It was, I fear, revenge; a burning desire to pay back the insults and injuries I had received from Theophilus Moncton, and to frustrate the manœuvres of his designing father.

"Has Sir Alexander no children?"

"He has a daughter—an only daughter, a fair, fragile girl of sixteen. The noblest, the most disinterested of her sex; a creature as talented as she is beautiful. Margaretta Moncton is destined to be the wife of her cousin Theophilus."

"Does he love her?"

"How can you ask that question, knowing the man, and after having read the note addressed to your uncle?"

"That note was signed A—— M——"

"It was written by an unhappy, infatuated creature, whom Theophilus *did* love, if such a passion as his callous bosom can feel, deserves the name. But he shall not escape my vengeance. The arrow is in the bow, and a punishment as terrible as his crime, shall overtake him yet."

"Oh, that you would enter more fully into these dark details. You are ingenious at tormenting. I am bewildered and lost amid these half disclosures."

“Hush, Geoffrey ! these walls have ears. I, too, am tortured, maddened by your questions. You are too imprudent—too impulsive, to trust with matters of such vital importance ; I have revealed too much already. Try and forget the events of this morning—nor let your uncle discover by look, word or gesture, that you are in the possession of his secret. He is deeply offended with his son—not on account of his base conduct to this poor orphan girl—but, because it is likely to hinder his marriage with Miss Moncton, which has been for years the idol wish of his heart. His morose spirit, once aroused, is deadly and implacable ; and in order to make Theophilus feel the full weight of his anger, he may call you to fill his vacant place.”

The sound of Mr. Moncton’s step in the passage, put a sudden stop to our conversation, but enough had been said to rouse my curiosity to the highest pitch ; and I tried in vain to lift the dark veil of futurity—to penetrate the mysteries that its folds concealed.



CHAPTER X.

DREAMS.

I WENT to bed early, and tried in vain to sleep. The events of the past day swam continually through my brain, and brought on a nervous headache. All the blood in my body seemed concentrated in my head, leaving my feet and hands paralyzed with cold. After tossing about for many hours, I dropped off into a sort of mesmeric sleep, full of confused images, among which the singular face of Dinah North haunted me like the genius of the night-mare.

Dreams are one of the greatest mysteries in the unsolved problem of life. I have been a dreamer from my cradle, and if

any person could explain the phenomena, the practical experience of a long life ought to have invested me with that power.

Most persons, in spite of themselves (or what they consider to be their better judgment), attach a superstitious importance to these visions of the night; nor is the vague belief in the spiritual agency employed in dreams, diminished by the remarkable dreams and their fulfillment, which are recorded in Holy writ, the verity of which we are taught to believe as an article of faith.

My eyes are scarcely closed in sleep, before I become an actor in scenes of the most ludicrous or terrific nature. All my mental and physical faculties become intensified, and enjoy the highest state of perfection; as if the soul centered in itself the qualities of its mysterious triune existence.

Beautiful visions float before the sight, such as the waking eye never beheld; and the ear is ravished with music which no earthly skill could produce. The dreaming sense magnifies all sounds and sights which exist in nature.

The thunder deepens its sonorous tone—ocean sends up a louder voice, and the whirlwind shakes the bending forest with tenfold fury.

I have beheld in sleep the mountains reel; the yawning earth disclose her hidden depths, and the fiery abyss swarm with hideous forms, which no waking eye could contemplate and the mind retain its rationality. I have beheld the shrinking sea yield up the dead of ages, and have found myself a guilty and condemned wretch, trembling at the bar of Eternal Justice.

“Oh! what have I not beheld in sleep?”

I have been shut up, a living sentient creature, in the cold, dark, noisome grave; have felt the loathsome worm slide along my warm, quivering limbs; the toad find a resting-place upon my breast; the adder wreath her slimy folds round my swelling throat; have struggled against the earthly weight that pressed out my soul and palsied my bursting heart, with superhuman strength; but every effort to free myself from my prison of clay

was made in vain. My lips were motionless—my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth and refused to send forth a sound. Hope was extinct—I was beyond the reach of human aid ; and that mental agony rendered me as powerless, as a moth in the grasp of a giant.

I have stood upon the edge of the volcano, and listened to the throbbings of Nature's fiery heart ; and heard the boiling blood of earth, chafing and roaring far below ; while my eyes vainly endeavored to explore its glowing depths. Anon, by some fatal necessity, I was compelled to cross this terrible abyss—my bridge, a narrow plank insecurely placed upon the rounded stems of two yielding, sapling trees. Suddenly, frightful cries resounded on every side, and I was pursued by fiend-like forms in the shape of animal life. I put my foot upon the fearful bridge, I tried its strength, and felt a horrid consciousness that I never could pass over it in safety ; my supernatural enemies drew nearer—I saw their blazing eyes—heard their low muttered growls ; the next moment I leaped upon the plank—with a loud crash it severed—and with the velocity of thought, I was plunged headlong into the boiling gulf—down—down—down—for ever whirling down—the hot flood rushed over me. I felt the spasmodic grasp of death upon my throat, and awoke struggling with eternity upon the threshold of time.

Most persons of a reflective character, have kept a diary of the ordinary occurrences of life. I reversed this time, honored mental exercise ; and for some months, noted down what I could remember of the transactions of the mind, during its sleeping hours.

So wild and strange were these records—so eccentric the vagaries of the soul during its nocturnal wanderings, that I was induced to abandon the task, lest some friend hereafter, might examine the mystic scroll, and conclude that it was written by a maniac.

It happened, that on the present night, I was haunted by a dream of more than ordinary wildness.

I dreamt, that I stood in the centre of a boundless plain of sand, that undulated beneath my feet like the waves of the sea. Presently I heard the rushing of a mighty wind, and as the whirl-blast swept over the desert, clouds of sand were driven before it, and I was lifted off my feet and carried along the tide of dust as lightly as a leaf is whirled onward through the air. All objects fled as I advanced, and each moment increased the velocity of my flight.

A vast forest extended its gloomy arms athwart the horizon ; but did not arrest my aerial journey. The thick boughs groaned and crashed beneath me, as I was dragged through their matted foliage ; my limbs lacerated and torn, and my hair tangled amid the thorny branches. Vainly I endeavored to cling to the twigs that impeded my passage, but they eluded my frenzied grasp, or snapped in my hands, while my cries for help were drowned in the thundering sweep of the mighty gale.

Onward—onward. I was still flying onward without the aid of wings. There seemed no end to that interminable flight.

At length, when I least expected a change, I was suddenly cast to the bottom of a deep pit. The luxury of repose to my wounded and exhausted frame, was as grateful and refreshing as the dews of heaven to the long parched earth. I lay in a sort of pleasing helplessness, too glad to escape from past perils to imagine a recurrence of the same evil.

While dreamily watching the swallows, tending their young in the holes of the sandy bank that formed the walls of my prison, I observed the sand at the bottom of the pit caught up in little eddies and whirling round and round. A sickening feeling of dread stole over me, and I crouched down in an agony of fear, and clung with all my strength to the tufts of thorny shrubs that clothed the sides of the pit.

Again the wind-fiend caught me up on his broad pinions, and I was once more traversing with lightning speed the azure deserts of air. A burning heat was in my throat—my eyes

seemed bursting from their sockets—confused sounds were murmuring in my ears, and the very blackness of darkness swallowed me up. No longer carried upward, I was now rapidly descending from some tremendous height. I stretched forth my hands to grasp some tangible substance in order to break the horrors of that fall, but all above, around and beneath me was empty air;—the effort burst the chains of that ghastly slumber, and I awoke with a short stifled cry of terror, exclaiming with devotional fervor, “Thank God! it is only a dream!”

The damp dewdrops stood in large drops upon my brow, my hands were tightly clenched, and every hair upon my head seemed stiffened and erect with fear.

“Thank God!” I once more exclaimed in an agony of gratitude, “it is only a dream!”

Then arose the question: “What was the import of this dream, the effects of which I still felt through all my trembling frame—in the violent throbbing of my heart and the ghastly cessation of every emotion save that of horror?”

Then I began to ponder, as I had done a thousand times before, over the mysterious nature of dreams, the manner in which they had been employed by the Almighty to communicate important truths to mankind, until I came to the conclusion that dreams were revelations from the spirit land, to warn us of dangers that threatened, or to punish us for crimes committed in the flesh.

“What are the visions that haunt the murderer’s bed,” I thought, “but phantoms of the past recalled by memory and conscience, and invested with an actual presence in sleep?”

Dr. Young, that melancholy dreamer of sublime dreams, has said—

“If dreams infest the grave,
I wake emerging from a sea of dreams.”

What a terrible idea of future punishment is contained in

these words to one, whose sleep like mine is haunted by unutterable terrors. Think of an eternity of dreaming horrors. A hell condensed within the narrow resting-place of the grave.

My reveries were abruptly dispelled by the sound of steps along the passage that led to my chamber. My heart began to beat audibly. It was the dead hour of the night—who could be waking at such an unusual time? I sat up in the bed and listened.

I heard voices : two persons were talking in a loud tone in the passage, that was certain. For a long time, I could not distinguish one word from another, until my own name was suddenly pronounced in a louder key ; and in a voice which seemed perfectly familiar to my ears.

The garret in which I slept, was a long, low, dingy apartment which formed a sort of repository, for all the worn-out law books, and waste papers belonging to the office, and, as I have before stated, the only furniture it possessed, was a mean truckle bed on which I slept, and a large iron chest, which Mr. Moncton had informed me, contained title deeds and other valuable papers, of which he himself kept the key.

They were kept in my apartment for better security ; as the stair which led to the flat roof of the house, opened into that chamber, and in case of fire, the chest and its contents could be easily removed.

For a wonder, I had never felt the least curiosity about the chest and its contents.

It stood in the old place, the day I first entered that dismal apartment when a child, and during the many long years that had slowly intervened, I never recollected having seen it unclosed. My attention for the first time was drawn to its existence by hearing my uncle say to some one in the passage in a hurried under-tone.

“Set your mind at rest, the paper is in the iron chest in that room. If you will not rely upon my promise to destroy it I will burn it before your eyes.”

"That alone will satisfy my doubts," returned his companion, "Be cautious how you open the door, or the lad will awake."

"Nonsense, young folks like him sleep well."

"Ay, Robert Moncton, they are not troubled with an evil conscience."

This last observation was accompanied with a low sarcastic laugh—and with an involuntary shiver, I recognized in the speaker, the mysterious old woman who had haunted my dreams.

"Conscience never troubles me, Dinah," returned Moncton, gloomily. "You first taught me to drown its warning voice, till my heart became callous and dead alike to God and man. Yes, you will laugh at me when I declare, that I would give all that I possess in the world, to feel again the remorse I felt after I joined you in the commission of that unholy deed. You were the tempter. To you I owe this moral death. This awful stagnation of heart, which I find worse to bear than the fiercest pain."

"You were an apt pupil," said the woman. "All your natural tendencies were evil. I only fostered and called them out. But what is the use of recalling unpleasant truths. Why don't you silence memory, when you have ceased to feel remorse. But I tell you what it is, Moncton. The presence of the one proves the existence of the other. The serpent is sleeping in his coil, and one of these days you will feel the strength of his fangs. Is this the door that leads to his chamber? You have chosen a sorry dormitory for the heir of the proud house of "Moncton."

"Hush! I wish he slept with his fathers. But even if he should awake, how could he guess, that our visit to his chamber could in any way concern him?"

"He has a shrewd face, an intelligent eye—an eye to detect treachery, and defy danger."

"On the contrary, a babe might deceive him."

"He has been educated in too hard a school to revel in such ignorance, Moncton."

"Hold your tongue, Dinah, and give me the light. Remember how you were deceived in his cousin Philip."

Mr. Moncton's hand was on the lock of the door—an almost irresistible impulse urged me to spring from the bed and draw the bolt. On second thoughts, however, I determined to feign sleep, and watch all that passed."

Resistance on my part would have been utterly useless, and I was anxious to find out, if possible, what connexion existed between my uncle, George Harrison, and this strange woman.

All this darted through my mind on the instant ; the rays of the candle flashed upon the opposite wall ; and my uncle, followed by his odious-looking companion, entered the room.

My intention of watching all their movements was completely frustrated by Mr. Moncton, who, advancing with cautious steps to my bed-side, held up the light in such a manner as not only to reveal my face, but the attitude in which I lay.

"Is he sleeping?" he whispered to his companion.

"He breathes like one in a profound slumber," was the reply. "'Tis a fine lad. How much he resembles Sir. Alexander?"

"His father, rather," sneered Moncton. "He's a second edition of Ned ; but has got more brains. Thanks to his grandfather, Geoffrey, and his own mother, who was a beautiful, talented creature. Stand by the bed, Dinah, and keep watch over him while I light that lamp which he has left on the window-sill, and search for the papers."

The old woman took the light from Mr. Moncton's hand, and his station beside my bed. My too lively imagination pictured the witch-like face, with its dark, snaky eyes, bending over me, and I found it impossible to maintain, with any appearance of reality, the composure I had assumed. In order to conceal the excited state of my mind, and to convince her of the certainty of my pretended slumber, I threw out my arms, and began to toss and turn, and mutter in my sleep, putting on all the con-

tortions which generally convulse the countenance of persons while writhing under the influence of some terrible dream. A state of perfect quiescence might have aroused suspicion ; the noise I made completely lulled theirs to sleep.

Meanwhile my uncle had unlocked the chest, and I heard him toss the papers it contained, upon the floor ; while, from time to time, he gave utterance to expressions indicative of vexation and disappointment.

After examining the contents of the box thoroughly, and returning the parchments to their original place, he said in a mortified tone :

"The papers are not here. How they have been abstracted I cannot imagine, as I always keep the key in a private drawer of my cabinet, which is known only to myself."

"Did you place them there yourself?" demanded the old woman, in a hurried whisper.

"No, but Walters, in whom I placed the most implicit confidence, assured me that he placed them here with his own hands. He may, however, have destroyed them, and anticipated my wishes."

"And you, with all your caution," sneered Dinah North, "could trust an affair of such importance to another."

"He was my creature, sworn to secrecy, and bought with my money, whose interest was to serve, not to betray me."

"A person who is capable of receiving a bribe to perform a base action, Moncton, is never to be trusted, especially a low-born fellow like Walters ; and where," she continued, anxiously, "is this man to be found ?"

"He left twelve years ago for America, and took out with him, Michael Alzure, my brother's old servant, and Mary Earl, the boy's nurse, who were the only witnesses to the marriage. I wanted him to take the boy himself, and adopt him into his own family, which would have saved us all further trouble, but this, to my surprise, he positively refused to do."

"To what part of America did he emigrate ?"

"First to Boston, where he remained for three years. He then removed to Philadelphia from the latter place. I twice received letters from him. He had been successful in business, and talked of buying land in the western States; for the last six years I have never heard of him or from him. It is more than probable that he is long since dead."

"People whom you wish out of the way, never die when you want them," said Dinah, with her peculiar sneering laugh. "But I think you told me that the"— I could not catch the word which she breathed into the ear of Mr. Moncton—"had been destroyed."

"Yes—yes. I burnt it with my own hand; this was the only document of any consequence, and it is a hundred chances to one, that he ever recovers it, or meets with the people who could prove his identity."

My uncle rose from his knees and locked the iron chest, then, extinguishing my lamp, he and the old woman left the room.

The sound of their retreating footsteps had scarcely died away, when, in spite of my wish to keep awake, I dropped off into a profound sleep, and did not again uncloze my eyes until it was time to dress for breakfast.



CHAPTER XI.

MY FIRST LOVE.

I FOUND my uncle sipping his coffee, as if nothing of importance had occurred during the night, to disturb his slumbers. I took my seat at the table in silence. My heart was full to bursting, and I dared not trust my voice, to offer him the common salutations of the morning.

My face, I have no doubt, betrayed the agitation which I endeavored to conceal.

"You are late this morning, Geoffrey."

"Yes sir—I passed a very restless night, and the result is a bad headache."

"How did that happen?" surveying me attentively, with his clear, glittering eyes.

"I was harassed by frightful dreams, and only awoke from one fit of night-mare to fall into a worse."

"Are you often troubled with bad dreams?" said he, without removing his powerful gaze from my pale face.

"Not often with such as disturbed me last night."

I detected my uncle's drift in using this species of cross-questioning, and I determined to increase his uneasiness without betraying my own.

"I wish, uncle, I had never seen that old woman who visited the office yesterday; she haunted me all night like my evil genius. Sir Matthew Hale might have condemned her for a witch, with a safe conscience."

"She is not a very flattering specimen of the fair sex," said my uncle, affecting a laugh, "but ugly as she now is, I remember her both young and handsome. What was the purport of your dream?"

"That I should like to know. The Josephs and Daniels of these degenerate modern days, are makers of money, not interpreters of dreams. But, I hope you don't imagine that I place the least importance on such things. My dream was simply this—

"I dreamed that that ugly old woman, whom you call Dinah North, came to my bedside with an intent to murder me." I paused and fixed my eyes upon Mr. Moncton's face. The glitter of his bright orbs almost dazzled me. I thought, however, that his cheek paled for a moment, and that I could perceive a slight twitching movement about the muscles of the mouth.

"Well," he said, quite calmly, "and what then?"

"For a long time I resisted her efforts to stab me with a long knife, and I received several deep wounds in my hands, in endeavoring to ward off her home-thrusts; till, faint with loss of blood, I gave up the contest, and called aloud for aid. I heard steps in the passage—some one opened the door—it was you, sir, and I begged you to save my life, and unloosen the fiend's grasp from my throat, but instead of the assistance I expected, you seized the knife from the old woman's hand, and with a derisive laugh, plunged it to the hilt in my heart. I awoke with a scream of agony, and with the perspiration streaming from every part of my body."

The dream was no invention of the moment, but had actually occurred, after Dinah North and Mr. Moncton had left my chamber. I wished to see what impression it would make upon him.

He leaned back in his chair with his eyes still fixed on my face. "It was strange, very strange—enough to excite a nervous, irritable fellow like you. Did you hear me come into your room last night?"

Taken by surprise, I gave an involuntary start, but regained my presence of mind in a moment. "Did you suspect, sir, that I was in the habit of leaving the house at night, that you thought it necessary to ascertain that I was in my bed?"

"Petulant boy! How ready you are to take offence at trifles. How do you expect to steer your way through the world? Business brought me into your room last night. Some papers belonging to the woman, whom your fertile imagination has converted into a witch or fiend, were in the iron chest. Anxious to satisfy her that the papers were safe, I went to look for them. You were making a sad noise in your sleep. I was half inclined to waken you, but thought that my presence in your chamber at that hour of night would only increase your uneasiness. The sound of my steps in the passage, I have no doubt, was the immediate cause of your dream."

This was a masterly stroke, and those who knew Robert Moncton, in a moment would recognize the man. The adroitness with which he mingled truth with falsehood, almost made me doubt the evidence of my senses, and to fancy that the events of the past night were a mental delusion.

"Did you find the papers you wanted, sir?"

His eye flashed, and his lip curled. "What business is that of yours, sir? I don't allow an impertinent boy to pry into my private affairs."

"My question was one of idle curiosity."

"Even as such, never dare to repeat it."

I was struck dumb, and concluded my breakfast without speaking to him again. When the tea equipage was removed, I rose to leave the room, but he motioned me to remain.

His anger had passed away, and his really handsome face wore a more agreeable expression than usual.

"Sit down, Geoffrey. I have long wished to converse with you upon your future prospects. What progress have you made in your profession?"

Astonished at his condescension, I told him candidly how I had of late improved my time, and studied late and early to acquire a competent knowledge of it in all its branches.

He was surprised, and appeared agreeably so.

"I had no idea of this, Geoffrey. Your industry has won for you a higher position than an office drudge. You cannot, however, make an able lawyer, without some knowledge of the world. To make a man of you it is absolutely necessary for you to go more into society."

"You forget, sir, that I have no means to indulge such a wish. I cannot consent to go into company under existing circumstances."

"Oh, we can manage all that," he said, tapping me on my shoulder. "Be obedient to my orders, and attend to my interest, and you shall not long want the means of gratifying your

wishes. Mr. Harrison has left the office. It is my intention that you supply his place."

"Harrison gone!" I cried in a tone of vexation and regret; "then I have lost my best friend."

"Harrison was a clever, gentlemanly young man," said Mr. Moncton, coldly; "but, to tell you the plain truth, Geoffrey, I did not like the close intimacy which existed between you."

"Why, it is to him that I am indebted for all the knowledge I have acquired. His society was the only pleasure I had, and it seems hard to be deprived of it, without any fault on his side."

"Geoffrey, it is of no consequence to me what your opinion may be on the subject; I am master of my own actions, and please myself as to whom I retain or employ. Clear up that scowling brow, and be very thankful to obtain a handsome salary for services which I can command without remuneration."

The loss of my friend, my only friend, was a dreadful blow. I was too much overcome to thank my uncle for his offer, and left the room with the tears in my eyes.

I had been so little accustomed to think for myself, that I relied upon George as my counsellor in all matters of importance. Besides, I had an idea that he could throw some light upon the mysterious events of the night, and I was anxious to unburden to him the important secret.

Having to obtain the signature of a gentleman who resided in Fleet street, to some legal documents, and knowing that Harrison lodged in the same street, I snatched up my hat and sallied forth, determined to consult him with regard to the change in my prospects, as I felt certain, that some sinister motive was concealed beneath my uncle's unlooked-for condescension.

I was again doomed to disappointment. On reaching Harrison's lodgings, I learned that he had left town that morning, for a visit of some weeks into the country, but to what part

his landlady didn't know. At parting, he told her she might rent his rooms until he gave her notice of his return.

"Gone ! without seeing or writing one line to inform me of his departure. It is cruel. Not like his general conduct," I muttered, as I turned from the door : "If he can deceive, I will never trust in mortal man again."

With a heavy heart I sauntered on unconscious of the path I had taken, until I found myself entangled among the crowds that thronged Oxford street.

A scream ! echoed by several voices from the crowd, "that the lady would be crushed to death," startled me from my unprofitable musings, and following the direction of the general gaze, I saw that a young female, in attempting to cross the street, had just fallen between the horses of two carriages advancing in opposite directions.

It was but the impulse of the moment to dash across the intervening space, to seize the horses of either carriage by their bridles, and push them forcibly back, and, by so doing, hinder the young lady from being trampled to death beneath their hoofs.

She, fortunately, was unconscious of her danger, and could not by useless screams and struggles, frighten the horses, and frustrate my endeavors to save her.

The coachmen belonging to the vehicles, succeeded in stopping the horses, and I bore my insensible burden through the crowd to an apothecary's shop, which happened to be near at hand.

The gentleman in attendance hastened to my assistance. We placed the young lady in a chair, and he told me to remove her bonnet, while he applied restoratives to her wrists and temples.

Fair she was, and exceedingly beautiful. Her rich, black, velvet pelisse, setting off to great advantage the dazzling whiteness of her skin, and the rich coloring of her sunny brown hair.

My heart throbbed audibly beneath the lovely head that rested so placidly above it ; and the arm that supported her graceful form, trembled like the leaf on the aspen. The glorious ideal of my youthful fancy had assumed a tangible form, had become a bright reality ; and as I looked down upon that calm, gentle face, love took possession of my heart.

The sorrows of the past—the difficulties of my present position—my recent vexations, all—all were forgotten. A new spirit had passed into me, I was only alive to the delicious rapture that thrilled through me.

First passion is instantaneous—electrical. It cannot be described, and can only be communicated through the same mysterious medium.

People may rave as they like about the absurdity of love at first sight ; but the young and sensitive always love at first sight, and the love of after years, however better, and more wisely bestowed, is never able to obliterate from the heart, the memory of those sudden and vivid impressions made upon it by the first electrical shocks of animal magnetism.

How eagerly I watched the unclosing of those blue eyes ; yet, how timidly I shrunk from their first mild rays.

Blushing, she rose from my arms, and shaking the long, sunny ringlets from her face, she thanked me with gentle dignity for the service I had rendered.

“ But for your prompt assistance, I must have lost my life, or at the very least, been seriously injured. My poor thanks will never convey to you the deep gratitude I feel.”

She gave me her hand with a charming frankness, and I touched the white slender fingers with as much reverence as if she had been a saint.

At this moment we were joined by a handsome elderly lady, who ran into the shop, exclaiming in hurried tones :

“ Where is she ?—where is my child ? Is she safe ?”

“ Yes, dear aunt, thanks to this young gentleman’s timely aid, who risked his own life to save mine.”

How shall we thank you—how shall we thank you, sir?" cried the elderly lady, seizing my hand, and all but embracing me in an extasy of gratitude. "You have rendered me a great service—a great service indeed. Without that dear girl life would be a blank to me. My Kate, my Kate!" she cried, clasping the young lady in her arms, and bursting into tears, "you don't know how dreadfully I felt when I saw you under the hoofs of those horses. My child! my child!—I can hardly yet believe that you are safe."

The charming Kate, tenderly kissed her weeping relative, and assured her that she could realize it all. That she must not fret, for she was quite herself again. Not even hurt; only frightened a little.

And then she turned her lovely face to me, on which a tear rested, like a dew-drop upon the heart of a rose, with such a sweet, arch smile, as she said, "My aunt is very nervous, and is so fond of me that her fears for my safety have quite upset her. The sooner we get her home the better. Will you be so kind, sir, as to tell me if a carriage is at the door. Ours is blue, with white horses."

The carriage was there. How I wished it at Jericho. The old lady again repeated her thanks in the warmest manner, and I assisted her and her charming niece into the equipage. The young lady waved her hand and smiled, the powdered flunkey closed the door, and they drove off, leaving me spell-bound, rooted to the door-sill of the shop.

"Who are those ladies?" asked the apothecary, looking complacently down upon the sovereign the elder lady had slipped into his hand.

"I was just going to ask that question of you," said I.

"How, not know them—and let them go away without inquiring their names! Arn't you a simple young fellow? If it had been me, now, I should have done my best to improve such a golden opportunity. Gratitude you know, begets love,

and I'll be sworn that the pretty young woman has a good fortune, by the anxiety the old one felt in her behalf."

I felt indignant at the apothecary for alluding to such a vulgar necessary of life as money. I was in the maddest heroics of love.

"What do I care about her property," said I disdainfully. "Such a beautiful, elegant creature, is a fortune in herself."

"Yes—to those who have enough of their own. But my dear young sir—beauty won't boil the pot."

"And who would wish to degrade it to such a menial occupation."

"Ha, ha, ha, young man. You give a literal meaning to the old proverb. You must be in love."

To joke me at the expense of the beautiful unknown was sacrilege, and casting upon my tormentor, a look of unmitigated contempt, I left the shop with a lofty step and an air of offended dignity.

As I passed into the street, I fancied that the term "ridiculous puppy!" was hissed after me.

I strode back into the shop. The apothecary was waiting upon a new customer.

"Was that insult intended for me," I demanded, in a haughty tone.

"What did I say, sir?"

"You called me a ridiculous puppy."

"You are mistaken, young man. I am not in the habit of speaking my thoughts aloud."

I deserved this cut for my folly, and felt keenly that I had placed myself in an absurd position. Unable to check the passion that was boiling in my veins, I levelled a blow at my antagonist, but unfortunately, or rather fortunately I ought to say, missed my aim. The gentleman who was leaning on the counter, and who seemed highly amused by the scene, took me by the arm and led me into the street. "Do not you perceive

that you are making a fool of yourself, and giving the apothecary an advantage over you. Go home, and act more prudently for the time to come. I am the father of several lads about your age, and you must take my advice in good part."

Though I felt hurt and mortified, I could but thank my new acquaintance for saving me from committing greater absurdities.

"My uncle is right," I said, to myself, as I retraced my steps to Hatton Garden. "I am a babe, in my knowledge of the world. I must go more into society, or I shall for ever be getting into such ridiculous scrapes."

At dinner my uncle met me with a serious face.

"What kept you from the office, Geoffrey, this morning?"

I, willing to act openly with him, narrated to him the adventure I had met with.

"I think I know the lady," he said. "She is not very tall—is fair complexioned, with blue eyes and light brown hair. *Rather* pretty than otherwise."

"*Rather* pretty. She is *beautiful*, sir."

"Phew!" said Mr. Moncton. "*We* see with other eyes. Young men are always blind. The girl is well enough—and better still, she is very rich. Did she tell you her name?"

"I did not ask her."

"Where was your curiosity?"

"I wished very much to put the question, for I was anxious to know; but really, uncle, I had not the face to do it. But you can tell me."

"If she did not tell you herself, I am not going to betray her secret. What use would the knowledge be to you?"

"It would be pleasant to know her name."

My uncle looked hard at me; and something like a sarcastic smile passed over his lips.

"Boy, it would render you miserable."

"In what way?"

"By leading you to neglect business, and by filling your head with hopes which could never be realized."

"And, why not?" I demanded, rather fiercely.

"Young ladies in our days, seldom commit matrimony with penniless clerks."

This was said with a strong sneer.

"It may be so—and they are right not to involve themselves in misery. I am penniless at present. But that is no reason that I am always to remain so. I am young, healthy, industrious, with a mind willing and able to work—why should I not make a fortune as others have done. As my grandfather, for instance, did before me?"

"This is all true," he said, calmly, "and I admire your spirit, Geoffrey; but nephew" (this was the first time I ever remember his calling me so), "there are other difficulties in the way of your making a high and wealthy alliance, of which you have no idea."

I know not why—but a sudden tremor seized me as he said this. But mastering my agitation, I begged him to explain his meaning.

"I have long wished to do so," he said, "but you were so violent and unreasonable, that I thought it prudent to defer unpleasant communications until you were older and better able to take things calmly. "You have thought me a hard taskmaster, Geoffrey—a cruel unfeeling tyrant, and from your earliest childhood have defied my authority and resisted my will. Yet—you know not half the debt of kindness you owe to me."

I was about to speak. He held up his hand for me to maintain silence; which I did with a very bad grace; and he continued in the same cold methodical way—

"Children are naturally averse to control, and are unable to discern between sternness of manner, and a cold unfeeling hardness of heart; and construe into insults and injuries the necessary restraint imposed upon their actions for their good.

Yours, I admit, was a painful situation, which you rendered still more unpleasant by your obstinate and resentful disposition."

"But, uncle!" I exclaimed, unable longer to hold my tongue, "you know I was treated very ill."

"Who treated you so? I am very certain, that Rebecca indulged you, as she never did one of her own children."

"My dear aunt! God bless her—she was the only creature in the house that treated me with the least kindness. The very servants were instructed to slight and insult me by your *amiable* son, and his servile tutor."

"He was a fool," said Mr. Moncton, re-filling his glass. "As to Theophilus, it was natural for him to dislike the lad who had robbed him of his mother's affections, and who left him behind in his lessons. You were strong enough, and bold enough to take your own part—and if I mistake not, did take it. And pray, sir, who was it, that freed you from the tyranny of Mr. Jones, when he found that the complaints you brought against him were just?"

"But not until after I had been first condemned, and brutally maltreated. The less said on that score, uncle, the better."

He laughed—his low, sarcastic, sneering laugh—but did not choose to be angry.

"There are circumstances connected with your birth, Geoffrey, that evidently were the cause of these slights. People will not pay the same respect to a natural child, which they do to a legitimate one."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, starting from my chair. "You don't mean to insinuate. You dare not say, that I am a bastard?"

"Such is the fact."

"It is a lie!—a base lie invented to ruin me!" I cried, defiantly, and shaking my fist in his face. "One of these days you shall be forced to prove it such."

"I shall be very happy to do so—if you will only give me the proofs."

"*Proofs!*" I exclaimed, bitterly, "they are in your own possession—or you have destroyed them!"

"What interest can I have in trying to make you a bastard? Is the boy mad?"

"You never act without a motive," I cried; "you know that I am heir to a title, and property that you covet for yourself and your son!"

His pretended calmness was all gone. His pale face crimsoned with rage. Yet it was wonderful how instantaneously he mastered his passion.

"Who told you this *probable* story? Who put such absurd notions into your head?"

"One, upon whose word I can rely. My friend, Mr. Harrison."

"I would like to ask Mr. Harrison what he knows of our family affairs," sneered Mr. Moncton. "He has proved himself a scoundrel by inventing this pretty little romance to get up a quarrel between us, and rob you of the only real friend you have. I will repay Mr. Harrison for this base falsehood, one of these days."

I felt that I had betrayed my friend, and, perhaps, by my foolish rashness marred my own fortunes. Inwardly I cursed my imprudence, and loaded myself with reproaches. Then the thought suggested itself, "Could my uncle be right—was I indeed illegitimate?"

"No, no," I exclaimed, unconsciously aloud; "it is not true—I feel that it is false. A base falsehood got up to rob me of my good name. The only treasure left me by Providence when she deprived me of my parents. Robert Moncton," I cried, standing erect before him, "I will never part with it. I will maintain my equality with you and your son to the last moment of my life!"

Overcome by excitement and agitation, I sank down into my chair, my head dropped upon the table and I sobbed convulsively.

"Geoffrey," said my uncle, in a low voice, in which an unusual touch of kindness mingled, "calm down this furious passion. Poor lad, I pity and excuse your indignation; both are natural, in your case."

"The pity of the wolf for the lamb," muttered I. "Such sympathy is worse than hate."

"Well, believe me the author of all your wrongs, if it pleases you, Geoffrey; but first listen to what I have to say."

I was too much exhausted by the violence of my emotions to offer the least opposition, and he had it entirely his own way—commencing his remarks with a provoking coolness which cut me to the heart.

"When you lost your parents, Geoffrey, you were too young to have formed a correct estimate of their characters."

"I have a very indistinct recollection of my father. I remember my mother well."

"You may imagine that. Your father had a fine, manly face, and nature had endowed him with those useless but brilliant qualities of mind, which the world calls genius, and like many of the same class, he acted more from impulse than from principle.

"Your mother was a beautiful young woman, but with little discretion, who loved unwisely and too well. Her father saw enough of my brother Edward's character, to awaken his suspicions that his attentions to his daughter were not of an honorable nature, and he forbade him the house.

"This impolitic step brought matters to a crisis. The young people eloped together, and the old man died of a broken heart. Your mother went by the name of Moncton, and was introduced to his sporting friends as my brother's wife. But no evidence exists of a marriage having taken place; and until such evidence can be produced, the world will look upon you as illegitimate.

"You will soon be of age, Geoffrey, and if you are prepared

with these indispensable documents, I will assist, to the best of my professional abilities, in helping you to establish your claims. It is not in my power to destroy or invalidate them. Why then these base suspicions—these unmerited reproaches—these hurricanes of passion? Why doubt my integrity at the very moment when I am most anxious to serve you?"

"Because in no instance have you ever proved yourself my friend, and I cannot help doubting your sincerity!"

"A want of candor is certainly not among your failings," said Mr. Moncton, with a slight curl of his proud lip. "You have studied the law long enough to know the impolicy of such conduct."

"I judge not from fair words but deeds. Sir, the change in your behavior to me is too sudden for me to believe it genuine."

"Strange," mused Mr. Moncton, "so young and so suspicious!" then turning to me, he said, without the least appearance of resentment at my violence,

"Geoffrey, I know your faulty temper, and forgive you for using such insulting language. The communication I have just made, was enough to irritate your sensitive nature and mortify your pride; but it is not reasonable that your anger should be directed against me.

"I considered it absolutely necessary, to apprise you of these important facts, and conveyed the knowledge of them to you, as gently as I could, just to show you, that you must depend upon your own exertions to advance your position in society."

"If your statement be true, what have I to do with society? What position could I obtain in a world which already regards me as an outcast?"

"Not here, perhaps. But there are other countries, where the conventional rules that govern society in this, are regarded with indifference—*America*, for instance.

He fixed his keen eye upon me. An electric flash passed into

my mind. I saw his drift. I recollected Harrison's advice that the only way to obtain my rights and baffle my uncle's cunning, was *non-resistance*. I formed my plans in a moment, and determined to foil his schemes by appearing to countenance them, until I could arrive at the truth, and fathom his designs—and I answered him with composure.

"Perhaps, I have done you injustice sir. The distracted state of my mind must be my excuse. I will try and submit with patience to my hard fate."

"It is your only wise course. Hark you, Geoffrey ! I am rich, trust in me, and the world shall never sneer at you as a *poor relation*. Those whom Robert Moncton takes by the hand may laugh at doubtful birth and want of fortune."

The scoundrel ! how I longed to knock him down, but that would have done me no good, so I mastered my indignation and withdrew.



CHAPTER XII.

I FORFEIT MY INDEPENDENCE.

"Be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," was the advice of the Divine Law-giver, when he sent his disciples forth on their heavenly mission to reform an evil world.

Religion, as I have before stated, had formed no part in my education. I had read the sacred volume with fear and trembling, and derived no consolation from its mystic pages.

I had adopted the fatal idea, that I was one of those pre-condemned beings, for whom the blackness of darkness was reserved for ever, and that no effort on my part, could avert the terrible decree.

This shocking and blasphemous belief had taken such deep

hold of my mind, that I looked upon all religious exercises as perfectly useless. I could not fancy myself one of the elect, and so went from that extreme to the other. If I were to be saved, I should be saved. If a vessel of wrath, only fitted for destruction, it was folly to struggle against fate, and I never suffered my mind to dwell upon the subject.

In the multitude of sorrows which pressed sorely on my young heart, I more than ever stood in need of the advice and consolation which the Christian religion can alone bestow.

I left the presence of Robert Moncton, and sought my own chamber. The lonely garret did not appear so repulsive as usual. No one would disturb its gloomy solitude, or intrude upon my grief. There I had free liberty to weep—to vent aloud, if I pleased, the indignant feelings of my heart. My mind was overwhelmed with bitter and resentful thoughts; every evil passion in man's fallen nature was struggling for mastery, and the worst agony I was called upon to endure, was the hopeless, heart-crushing, downward tending madness of despair.

To die—to get rid of self—the dark consciousness of unmerited contempt and social degradation, was the temptation which continually flitted through my excited brain. I have often since wondered how I resisted the strong impulse that lured me onward to destruction.

My good angel prevailed. By mere accident, my Bible lay upon the iron chest. I eagerly seized the volume, and sought in the first page I should open, an omen that should decide my fate, and my eye glanced upon the words already quoted—"Be ye, therefore, wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."

I closed the book and sat down, and tried to shape the words to suit my present state. What better advice could I follow—from what higher authority could I derive sounder counsel? Did it not suit completely my case?

Harrison had disappeared. I was alone and friendless in the house of the oppressor. Did I follow the suggestions of my own

heart, I should either destroy myself, or quit the protection of Mr. Moncton's roof for ever.

"But then," said reason, "if you take the first step, you are guilty of an unpardonable sin, and by destroying yourself, further the sinister views of your uncle. If the second, you throw away seven years of hard labor, lose your indentures, and for ever place a bar to your future advancement. In a few months you will be of age, and your own master. Bear these evils patiently a little longer—wait and watch—you never can regain your lost name and inheritance by throwing yourself friendless upon the world."

Determined to adopt, and strictly to adhere to this line of conduct, and leave the rest to Providence, I washed the traces of tears from my face, and returned to the private office.

Here I found Mr. Moncton engaged with papers of consequence.

He held out his hand as I took my seat at the desk. "Are we friends, Geoffrey?"

"That depends upon circumstances."

"How hard it is for you to give a gracious answer. It is your own fault that we ever were otherwise."

"I will try and think you my friend for the time to come."

He seemed more amused than surprised at this concession, and for some time we both wrote on in silence.

A tap at the door, and one of the clerks handed in a letter.

Mr. Moncton examined the post-mark and eagerly opened it up. While reading, his countenance underwent one of those remarkable changes I had on several occasions witnessed of late, and which seemed so foreign to his nature.

Suddenly, crushing the letter tightly in his hand, he flung it from him to the floor, and spurned it with his foot, exclaiming as he did so, with a fiend-like curl of the lips: "So would I serve the writer were he here!" Then turning to me, and speaking in a low, confidential tone, he said:

"The writer of that letter is unconsciously making your fortune, Geoffrey. This son of mine has acted in a base, ungrateful manner to me—in a manner which I can never forget or forgive. If you conduct yourself prudently, you may become dearer to me than this wicked young man."

"I should be sorry to rise on my cousin's ruin. I would rather gain your respect on any other terms."

This remark made him wince.

"Foolish boy! How blind you are to your own interest. You belong to a family famous for playing the fool. It runs in the blood of the Monctons."

"You surely are an exception, sir," and I tried in vain to suppress a sarcastic smile.

He took no notice of this speech, but, starting from his seat, paced the room for some minutes, as if in deep communion with himself.

"Geoffrey," he said at last, "from this day I adopt you as my son. I exempt you from the common drudgeries of the office, and will engage masters to instruct you in the fashionable accomplishments which are deemed necessary to complete the education of a gentleman."

I was mute with astonishment.

"Trifling as these things may appear to the man of science and the candidate for literary honors, they are not without their use to the professional student. The world judges so much by externals, that nothing is to be despised that helps to flatter its prejudices, and ensure popularity.

"You are not too old to learn dancing, fencing and riding. I should like you to excel in athletic sports and exercises."

"You are making game of me, uncle;" for I could not believe him in earnest.

"By the living God! Geoffrey, I mean what I say."

I stood before him, gazing into his face like one in a dream. There was a downright earnestness in his face which could not

be mistaken. He was no longer acting a part, but really meant what he said. Nor could I doubt but that letter had wrought this sudden change in my favor. Where, now, was all my high-souled resolutions; human nature prevailed, and I yielded to the temptation. There sat Robert Moncton, gazing complacently upon me, from beneath those stern, dark brows, his glittering eyes no longer freezing me with their icy shine, but regarding me with a calm, approving smile. No longer the evil genius of my childhood, but a munificent spirit intent to do me good.

Ah, I was young—very young, and the world, in my narrow circle, had dealt hardly with me. I longed for freedom, for emancipation from constant toil. This must plead an excuse for my criminal weakness.

Years of painful experience, in the ways and wiles of men, had not as yet perfected the painful lesson taught me in after years. Young, ardent, and willing to believe the best I could of my species, I began to think that I alone had been to blame; that I had wronged my uncle, and thrust upon his shoulders the burden of injuries which I had received from his son.

The evil influence of that son had been removed, and he was now willing to be my friend; and I determined to bury the past in oblivion, and to believe him really and truly so.

I shook him warmly by the hand, and entreated his forgiveness for the hard thoughts I had entertained, and thanked him sincerely for his offers of service.

The light faded from his eye. He looked gloomily, almost sadly into my face, glowing, as it must have been, with generous emotions, marvelling, doubtlessly, at my credulity.

Mr. Moncton, up to this period, had resided in the house which contained his office; the basement having been appropriated entirely for that purpose, while the family occupied the floors above. My uncle seldom received visitors, excepting at

those times when Theophilus returned from college. To these parties, I, as a matter of course, had never been admitted. My uncle's evenings were spent abroad, but I was unacquainted with his habits, and totally ignorant of his haunts.

Judge then, of my surprise and satisfaction when informed by Mr. Moncton, that he had purchased a handsome house in Grosvenor street, and that we were to remove thither. The office was still to be retained in Hatton Garden, but my hours of attendance were not to commence before ten in the morning ; and were to terminate at four in the afternoon.

I had lived the larger portion of my life in great, smoky London, and had never visited the west end of the town. The change in my prospects was truly delightful. I was transported as if by magic from my low, dingy, ill-lighted, ill-ventilated garret, to a well-appointed room on the second story of an elegantly furnished house in an airy, fashionable part of the town ; the apartment provided for my especial benefit, containing all the luxuries and comforts which modern refinement has rendered indispensable.

A small, but well-selected library crowned the whole.

I did little else the first day my uncle introduced me to this charming room, but walk to and fro from the book-case to the windows. Now glancing at the pages of some long coveted treasure ; now watching with intense interest the throng of carriages passing and repassing ; hoping to catch a glance of the fair face, that had made such an impression on my youthful fancy.

A note from Mr. Moncton, kindly worded for him, conveyed to me the pleasing intelligence that the handsome pressfull of fine linen, and fashionably cut clothes, was meant for my use ; to which he had generously added, a beautiful dressing-case, gold watch and chain.

I should have been perfectly happy, had it not been for a vague, unpleasant sensation—a certain swelling of the heart,

which silently seemed to reproach me for accepting all these favors from a person whom I neither loved nor respected.

Conscience whispered that it was far better to remain poor and independent, than compromise my integrity.

Oh, that I had given more heed to that voice of the soul ! That still, small voice, that never lies—that voice that no one can drown, without remorse and self-condemnation.

Time brought with it the punishment I deserved, convincing me then, and for ever, that no one can act against his own conviction of right, without incurring the penalty due to his moral defalcation.

I dined alone with Mr. Moncton.

He asked me if I was pleased with the apartments he had selected for my use. I was warm in my thanks, and he appeared satisfied.

After the cloth was drawn, he filled a bumper of wine, and pushed the bottle over to me.

"Here's to your rising to the head of the profession, Geoffrey. Fill your glass, my boy."

I drank part of the wine, and set the glass down on the table. It was fine old Madeira. I had not been used to drink anything stronger than tea and coffee, and I found it mounting to my head.

"I will not allow that, Geoffrey—you must honor my toast."

"I have done so, uncle, as far as I am able. I have had enough wine."

"Nonsense, boy ! Don't you like it ?"

"I hardly know. It makes me feel giddy and queer."

"Ha ! ha ! that's good"—chuckling, and rubbing his hands.

"If I take more just now, I shall certainly be tipsy."

"What then ?"

"It would be disgraceful. In your presence, too."

"What—were you never drunk ?"

"Never, in my life."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"And never intoxicated—well, that's a good joke. Few young men of your age could say that. Would you not like to increase your knowledge, and be as wise as others?"

I shook my head.

"Ridiculous prudery. Come, fill your glass, and I will tell you a droll anecdote of that pretty girl you fell in love with the other day."

The glass was instantly replenished, and I was wide awake in a moment.

"That young lady had a very pretty cousin—a West Indian—a high-spirited, dashing girl, who had lost her parents, and was on a visit in England to her aunt—with whom the fair Catherine resides. The girls, among other things, were very curious to know how men felt when they were drunk. 'It surely must be a very agreeable sensation,' said my little friend Kate, 'or they would not so often give way to it.'"

"Suppose we try?" said Miss Madcap.

"Dear me, what would aunt think of us?"

"We won't let her know a word about it. She goes out to-morrow, to spend a few days in the country. I will smuggle into our room a couple of bottles of champagne—we'll lock the door, feign indisposition, and get glorious."

"And did they do it?"

"To be sure they did. 'We drank one bottle between us,' said my little friend, 'and I never was so ill in my life. I was only astonished after we got sober, how any one could try the experiment a second time.' Had they tried it a second time, Geoffrey, all the difficulty would have been removed."

He drank off several glasses in succession, and for fear I should be thought deficient in spirit; I followed his example. But the Rubicon once crossed, to my surprise, I found that the wine had no effect upon my senses; only serving to elevate my spirits a little, and make me more sociable and communicative.

My uncle's stern face began to relax from its usual cold severity, and I found that when warmed with wine, he could be a most intelligent and agreeable companion. After conversing for some time on indifferent subjects, he said—

"You think you remember your parents. I have their portraits. Perhaps you would like to keep them in your own possession."

"No present you could make me, would be so valuable," I cried.

"No heroics," he said, going to a beautiful inlaid cabinet. "I detest sentimental people. They are the greatest humbugs in the world."

Returning to the table, he placed two large miniature cases in my hand, I eagerly seized them.

"Don't look at them now," he cried, "or we shall have a scene—wait until you are alone. I found them among my brother's papers, and had forgotten all about them, until I chanced to stumble over them in the bustle of removing."

I hid away the precious relics in my bosom, and was about to quit the room.

"Sit down, Geoffrey," he said, with a grim smile, "you are too sober to go to bed yet."

I filled the glass mechanically, but it remained untasted before me.

"By the by," continued my uncle, in a careless tone, which his eagle glance contradicted, "what has become of you friend Harrison?"

"I wish I knew. His absence is a great loss to me."

"Who and what is this Harrison. You were his confidant, and, doubtless, know?"

"Of his private history, nothing."

My uncle's large dark eyes, were looking into my soul; I felt that he doubted by word. "He has, I believe, been unfortunate and is reduced in his circumstances. His moral character, *I know* to be excellent."

"And doubtless you are a *capital judge*," said Mr. Moncton. "Young men all imagine themselves as wise as Daniel or Socrates. I think, however, friend Geoffrey, that this man deceived you."

"Impossible. Harrison is incapable of committing a mean or dishonorable action. Nor does he attempt to spare himself from blame; but frankly confesses, that to his own imprudence, he is mainly indebted for his misfortunes."

"*Imprudence* is a respectable term for intemperance, dissipation, and vice of every kind," sneered my uncle. "Your moral young gentleman might preach against sins which had caused his own ruin. Believe me, Geoffrey, the crimes and passions of most men are alike, with only this difference, that some have greater art of concealing them."

"That would make virtue a mere name," said I, indignantly. "I cannot believe *that* ideal, which I have been used to worship as a *reality*."

"All bosh. At your age, men cling to the ideal, and resolutely close their eyes to the true and rational. I was guilty of the same weakness once."

"You, uncle!"

"Ay, you are astonished. But the time came, and too soon, when I learned to wonder at my own credulity. I was in love once. You smile. Yes, with that old witch, as you call her now. She was as beautiful as an angel then. She is an incarnate devil now! Love has turned to hate—admiration to execration—and I curse myself for ever having thought her wise or good."

He flung himself into a chair and groaned like one in acute pain; and I, thinking he wished to be alone, slipped away before he raised his head from between his clasped hands.

"What could he mean by asking me so many questions?" I cried, as I threw myself into an easy chair in my luxurious apartment. "Were they instigated by the wine he had drunk,

or suggested by idle curiosity—or were my answers intended to answer some sinister purpose? God knows. He is a strange inexplicable man, whose words and actions the most profound lawyer could scarcely fathom. I think he endeavored to make me intoxicated in the hope of extracting some information regarding poor George. If so, he has missed his mark.”

I drew from my bosom the portraits he had given me, perhaps as a bait to win my confidence ; but I was thankful to him for the inestimable gift, whatever the motives were which led to its bestowal.

The first case contained the miniature of my father. The gay, careless, happy countenance, full of spirit and intelligence, seemed to smile upon his unfortunate son.

I raised my eyes to the mirror—the same features met my glance ; but ah, how different the expression of the two faces. Mine was saddened and paled by early care, by close confinement to a dark unhealthy office ; at twenty, I was but a faded likeness of my father.

I sighed as I pressed the portrait to my heart. In the marked difference between us I read distinctly the history of two lives.

But how shall I describe my feelings whilst gazing on the picture of my mother. The fast falling tears for a long while hid the fondly remembered features from my sight—but they still floated before the eyes of my soul in all their original loveliness.

Yes—there was the sweet calm face—the large soft confiding blue eyes—the small rosy mouth with its gentle winning smile, and the modest truthful expression of the combined features which gave such a charm to the whole.

Oh, my mother—my dear, lost, angel mother—how that picture recalled the far-off happy days of childhood, when I sat upon your knees, and saw my own joyous face reflected in those dove-like eyes ; when, ending some nursery rhyme with a kiss,

you bowed your velvet cheek upon my clustering curls, and bade God bless and keep your darling boy.

Oh my mother!—would that I could become a child again, or that I could go to you, though you cannot return to me.

I leant my head upon the table and wept. Those tears produced a salutary effect upon my mind, and slipping down upon my knees, I poured out the feelings of my oppressed heart in prayer, and after awhile rose from the ground in a more composed state of mind. The picture still lay there smiling upon me. “Is it of you, dearest mother,” I said, “that bad men dare whisper hard things? Who could look at that pure lovely face and believe aught against your honor? I could despise my father, though his only son, could I for an instant imagine him capable of taking advantage of such youth and innocence. But no—it is a foul slander invented by a villain to answer some base purpose—and may I perish, when I believe it true!”

I locked the portraits carefully in my desk, and retired to bed. The wine I had drank and the unusual excitement of my feelings for a long time prevented sleep, and it was the dawn of day before I sank to rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

A VISIT FROM THE GREAT MAN OF THE FAMILY.

From that day, I became Mr. Moncton's factotum, his confidential clerk, and principal agent. In all matters that required prompt and skillful management he invariably employed me.

If he did not regard me with affection—for that was foreign to his nature—he respected my abilities, and placed the greatest reliance on my principles. I attended him in most of his profes-

sional journeys, and was present in every court in which he had an important case. He was an admirable speaker, and his cool, decided manner had great weight with both judge and jury. I no sooner appeared with him in public than I became a person of considerable consequence among his friends and acquaintances, and invitations flowed in upon me from all quarters. One thing appeared very certain, that the same persons who had despised the shabbily-dressed lawyer's clerk, no longer regarded me with cold eyes as a *poor relation*, but were among the first to overwhelm me with civilities ; and, for a while, I was intoxicated with the adulation I received from the world and its smooth-tongued votaries.

Three months glided rapidly away, and every day added to my self-importance, and brought with it fresh opportunities of enlarging the circle of my friends, and of acquiring a competent knowledge of the conventional rules of society. Though naturally fond of company, I hated dissipation, and those low vices which young men of common minds generally designate as pleasure, in the pursuit of which they too often degrade their mental and physical powers. Mr. Moncton laughed at what he termed my affectation of moral integrity, and tried by every art to seduce me to join in amusements, and visit scenes, from which my mind revolted ; and his own example served to strengthen my disgust. My resistance to such temptations I do not ascribe to any inherent virtue in me ; but I have often observed in my subsequent journey through life, that young men, whose knowledge of the world has chiefly been confined to books, and who have never mingled much with persons of their own age, are guarded from low vices by the romantic and beautiful ideal of life, which they formed in solitude. The coarse reality is so shocking and degrading, so repugnant to taste and good feeling, and all their pre-conceived notions upon the subject, that they cannot indulge in it without remorse and a painful sense of degradation. This was so completely my case, that I often fled

to solitude as a refuge from pleasures, so-called, that I could not enjoy, and scenes in which I felt shame to be an actor. Perhaps I was mainly indebted to the passion I had conceived for the beautiful Catherine, which acted as a secret talisman in securing me from the contaminating influences to which, in my new position, I was often exposed. In the hope of meeting again the fair creature whose image filled my soul, I had frequented theatres, operas, and public balls, but to no purpose ; on this head I was still doomed to suffer the most provoking disappointment.

One evening I returned late from the office in Hatton Garden ; my uncle was from home, and a great press of business had detained me beyond the usual dinner hour, which was at six. The porter had scarcely admitted me into the hall, when one of the footmen, with whom I was a great favorite, addressed me with an air of mystery which I thought highly amusing. He seemed so anxious to impress me with the importance of the news he had to communicate.

"Mr. Geoffrey, Sir Alexander Moncton, my master's cousin, sir, is in the dining-room, waiting to see you ; and the dinner, sir, is waiting, too. I told him, sir, that we expected Mr. Moncton home this evening, and he bade his valet bring up his portmantau from the hotel, and said that he would wait here till measter returned."

"Thank you, Saunders, for your information," I cried, hurrying off to my chamber to dress for dinner.

I felt greatly excited at the prospect of the approaching interview with the great man of the family, who might prove a powerful friend to his friendless relative.

My uncle was from home, which would afford me an opportunity of speaking for myself. I was anxious to make a favorable impression on Sir Alexander, and took an unusual degree of pains with my toilet, but the more trouble I gave myself, the worse I succeeded. One suit, which was my very best, I fancied

too fine, and that it made me look vulgar, another was unbecoming. In short, no bride on her wedding morning, ever felt more diffident of the appearance she would make, than I did on this important occasion—which, hope whispered, was to prove the great epoch in my life.

The extravagance of youthful hope, is only equalled by youthful vanity ; and whilst standing before the polished mirror, contemplating my own person with the desire to appear to the best advantage, I forgot the stigma attached to my birth, my dependent situation, and the very proud man in whose presence I was about to appear.

After pondering over for a few minutes, the manner in which I should address him, a sudden sense of the absurdity of my conduct struck me so forcibly, that my day-dreams vanished in a hearty fit of laughter.

“ Hang it ! ” I exclaimed, “ what a ridiculous puppy I am going to make of myself, with all this affectation and nonsense. Nature is the best guide in works of art, why should not our conversation and manners be governed by the same unerring rule ? Simplicity and truth possess a charm, that never can belong to studied airs and grimaces. It is better to appear as I am, with all my imperfections, than affect to be what I am not, even if by so doing, I could ensure the good opinion of this wealthy titled relation.”

With these wise reflections, I regained my composure, and joined Sir Alexander in the drawing-room—just as the footman announced that dinner was on the table.

Sir Alexander received me, and my apologies for detention in the office, with a mighty good grace, shook me warmly by the hand, and accompanied me into the dining-room, with the air of a man who was determined not to be cheated out of his dinner, and anxious to make up for lost time.

I did the honors as well as I could ; but not without committing sundry awkward blunders ; greatly to the horror of

Saunders, who with toe and elbow, gave me various silent hints upon the subject, as he glided noiselessly to and fro. This only increased my confusion, but fortunately, my worthy relative was too much engrossed with his dinner, to notice the trifling omissions, which poor Saunders considered of such immense importance.

I was greatly relieved when the cloth was removed ; and the wine and glasses were placed upon the table, and Sir Alexander and I were left alone to improve our acquaintance.

He commenced the conversation by introducing the very subject uppermost in my mind.

“ Did I mistake you, young gentleman, or did you tell me, that you were a son of the late Edward Moncton ? ”

“ His only son.”

“ I was not aware of his marriage—still less that he left a son. It is strange, that I should have been kept in ignorance of this important fact.”

This was said half musingly. He then turned to me with a lively air.

“ Your father, young gentleman, deeply offended me. It was a foolish affair. But it effectually severed the friendship of years. We repent of these things when it is too late. Had he been less violent, and less obstinate, a reconciliation might have been brought about. As it was—interested parties did their best to widen the breach.

“ Edward and I were school-fellows ; and though little harmony existed between the elder branches of the family, we loved like brothers. He was a handsome, generous, high-spirited fellow, but rash and extravagant. While at school he was always in debt and difficulty, to the great annoyance of his money-loving father, who looked upon me, as the aider and abettor in all his scrapes. We continued firm friends until the night before he left college, when the quarrel, which I do not mean to particularize, took place—from which period, we never met, and all cor-

respondence ceased between us. I heard, that in after years, he made a love connexion ; but I never learned the particulars from any one but your uncle Robert ; and he did not inform me, that Edward had left a son—nor can I comprehend his motive for concealing the fact.”

Sir Alexander paused and looked earnestly in my face. I felt the blood rush to my temples.

“I do not doubt your veracity, young sir. You are too like the man I loved so long and well, for me to question your origin. But are you *certain* that you are Edward Moncton’s legitimate son?”

“I feel no doubt upon the subject ; my heart tells me that I am his lawful representative ; and I trust that heaven will one day enable me to substantiate my claims.” This was said with a vehemence that brought the tears into my eyes.

“Does Robert Moncton admit them?”

“No.”

“On what grounds?”

“He affirms, that no certificate of my mother’s marriage can be found, and without this important document, the law will not acknowledge me as Edward Moncton’s legitimate son.”

“Or Alexander Moncton’s heir,” replied the Baronet. “But I do not judge like the rest of the world, young man, and dare to think and act for myself. This uncle of yours is a cunning man. I know him and his ways of old. I know how he fomented the quarrel between his brother and me, to gain his own ends ; and this son of his—this Theophilus, is a finished scoundrel ! It is mortifying to the pride of an English gentleman to acknowledge such men as his successors.”

The old man rose from his seat, and paced the room for some time in silence. He was so much occupied with his own reflections, that I had leisure to examine his countenance minutely.

A strong family likeness existed between him and my father, and uncle Robert ; and as for me—I might have passed for his

son. He had the same high forehead, aquiline nose, chestnut curling hair, and dark piercing eyes ; but his face lacked the careless, frank, good nature of my father's, and was totally destitute of the subtle, stern demeanor of my uncle's. The expression was more simple, and less worldly than either. It was a thoughtful, intellectual, benevolent physiognomy, which excited feelings of confidence and affection at first sight. While looking at him, I thought I had known and loved him for years.

His tall commanding figure was slightly bent in the shoulders, and his hair was thickly sprinkled with grey ; yet, his age could scarcely have exceeded fifty. His complexion, unlike my handsome uncle's, was very pale, and an early acquaintance with grief might be traced in the lines that furrowed his ample white forehead.

After a few turns through the room, he resumed his seat.

"Mr. Geoffrey Moncton," he said, grasping me warmly by the hand, "I wish sincerely that you could prove your legitimacy. There is something about you that pleases and interests me. If ever you stand in need of assistance you may rely upon me as your friend. It is not Robert Moncton's bare assertion that will make me believe you a bastard. Tell me all you know about yourself?"

I endeavored to speak, but I was so completely overwhelmed by his unexpected kindness, that I could find no words to express my thanks, or comply with his request.

A loud knocking at the door, announced the arrival of Mr. Moncton.

"That is my uncle's knock," I cried, breaking the spell that bound me.

"We will talk over this matter again, Geoffrey. If we cannot get an opportunity, you must write, and tell me all you know."

Before I could promise anything Mr. Moncton entered the room. He cast a hurried, scrutinizing glance at me, and seemed

surprised and annoyed at finding me on such intimate terms with the baronet, to whom he gave a most cordial and flattering welcome.

The other met his advances with cold and studied politeness ; it was evident to me that he, too, put a restraint upon his feelings.

"I am sorry, Sir Alexander, that I was from home when you arrived. This visit *from you* is such an *unexpected* favor."

"Your absence, Robert Moncton, gave me an opportunity of making the acquaintance of your nephew, whom I have found a very agreeable and entertaining substitute, as well as a near relation."

Mr. Moncton regarded me with a haughty and contemptuous smile.

"I am happy to learn that your time was so agreeably spent. By-the-by, Geoffrey," turning abruptly to me, and speaking in a hasty, authoritative tone, "are those papers transcribed I gave you at parting ? They will be required in court early to-morrow."

He evidently expected a negative.

"They are ready, sir, and many others, that have been placed in my hands since. We have been hard at work in the office all day."

"I commend your diligence," he said, affecting a patronizing air ; "I am sorry to take you from such pleasant company, but business, you know, cannot be neglected. This bundle of papers"—and he took a packet from his wallet and placed in my hand—"must be transcribed to-night. You need not go to the office. Step into the study, you will find all that you require there."

This was but a stratagem to get rid of my unwelcome presence. I bowed to Sir Alexander, and reluctantly withdrew.

It so happened, that Mr. Moncton's study opened into the dining-room, and without meaning to do so, I left the door but partially closed.

Sitting down to the table, I trimmed the large shaded lamp that always burnt there, and began mechanically to transcribe the uninteresting papers. An hour passed away. The gentlemen were conversing upon the current news of the day over their wine. The servant brought up coffee, and I ceased to give any heed to what was passing in the next room.

I was drawing out a long deed of settlement, when my attention was aroused by the mention of my own name, and the following dialogue caught my ear :

"This nephew of yours, Robert Moncton, is a fine lad. How is it that I never heard of him before ?"

"I did not think it necessary to introduce him to your notice, Sir Alexander. He has no legal claim upon our protection. He is a natural son of Edward's, whom I educate for the profession out of charity."

"An act of benevolence hardly to be expected from you," said Sir Alexander, with a provoking laugh. "I suppose you expect to get the interest for your kindness out of the lad ?"

"Why, yes. He has excellent abilities, and might do much for himself, but is too like the father, but with this difference—Edward was good-natured and careless to a fault—this boy is haughty and petulant, with the unmanageable obstinacy and self-will of old Geoffrey. He is not grateful for the many obligations he owes to me, and gives me frequent cause to regret that I ever adopted him into my family."

"When you are tired of him," said Sir Alexander, carelessly, "you may turn him over to me. I am sure I could make something of him."

"You are not in earnest ?" in a tone of surprise.

"Never more so."

A long silence ensued. My hand trembled with indignation. Was this Mr. Moncton's pretended friendship ? I tried in vain to write. "It is useless," I said mentally. "The deed may go to the devil, and Robert Moncton along with it, for what I

care," and I flung the parchment from me. "That man is an infamous liar ! I will tell him so to his face."

I was just about to burst into the room, when Sir Alexander resumed the conversation.

"Who was this lad's mother?"

"A young person of the name of Rivers ; the only daughter of a poor curate, in Derbyshire. You know my brother's dissipated habits. He enticed the girl from her peaceful home, and grief for her loss brought the old father to his grave. This boy was the sole fruit of the connection. The parents were never married."

"Is that a fact?"

"I have made every legal inquiry upon the subject ; but, no proofs are in existence of such an union between the parties."

"I can scarcely believe Edward guilty of such a villainous act!"

"Extravagant men of unsettled principles are not much troubled with qualms of conscience. On his death-bed Edward repented of this act, and recommended the child to my especial care and protection. His letter, which I have by me, was couched in such moving terms, that I considered myself bound in duty to do what I could for the boy, as he was not answerable for the fault of the parents. I took him home the day his mother was buried, and he has been an inmate of my house ever since."

"When he is out of his time, what do you intend doing for him?"

"I have not yet determined. Perhaps, associate him with myself in the office. There is, however, one stumbling-block in the way—the dislike which exists between him and Theophilus."

"Ay, Geoffrey, I should think, would prove rather a formidable rival to your son."

"Comparisons are odious, Sir Alexander ; I should be sorry if my son resembled this base-born lad."

"I can see no likeness between them," said Sir Alexander, drily, "not even a family one. By-the-bye, what has become of Theophilus?"

"He is travelling on the continent. His last letter was dated from Rome. He has been a great source of trouble and vexation to me, and is constantly getting into scrapes among the women, which you must allow, Sir Alexander, is a family failing of the Monctons."

"His conduct lately has been such," said the baronet, in an angry voice, "that it makes me blush that we bear the same name. It was to speak to you on this painful subject that brought me to London."

"I know the circumstance to which you allude," said Mr. Moncton, in a humble tone; "nor can I defend him; but, we must make some allowances for youth and indiscretion. We were young men ourselves once, Sir Alexander."

"Thank God! bad as I might be, no poor girl could accuse me of being the cause of her ruin," cried the baronet, striking his hand emphatically upon the table. "But this young scoundrel! while a visitor beneath my roof, and a solicitor for the hand of my daughter, outraged all feelings of honor and decency, by seducing this poor girl, on our own estate, at our very doors. It was mean, wicked, dastardly—and without he marries his unhappy victim, he shall never enter my doors again."

"*Marry!*" and Mr. Moncton hissed the words through his clenched teeth. "Let him dare to marry her, and the sole inheritance he gets from me, will be his father's curse!"

"Till he does this, and, by so doing, wipes off the infamous stain he has brought upon our house, I must consider both father and son as strangers!"

"Please yourself, Sir Alexander. You will never bully me into giving my consent to this disgraceful marriage," cried Moncton, stamping with rage.

There was another long pause. I heard Sir Alexander traversing the apartment with hasty strides. At length, stopping suddenly before his excited companion, he said ; "Robert, you may be right. The wicked woman, who sold her grandchild for money, was once in your service. You best know what relationship exists between your son and his beautiful victim."

A hollow laugh burst from Mr. Moncton's lips.

"You possess a lively imagination, Sir Alexander. I did love that woman, though she was old enough then to have been my mother. It was a boy's rash, blind love ; but I was too proud to make her my wife, and she was too cunning and avaricious to be mine on any other terms. Your suspicions, on *that head* at least, are erroneous."

"Be that as it may," said Sir Alexander, "Theophilus Moncton shall never darken my doors until the grave closes over me."

He left the room while speaking. A few minutes later, a carriage dashed from the door at a rapid rate, and I felt certain that he had quitted the house. My uncle's step approached. I let my head drop upon the table and feigned sleep, and without attempting to waken me, he withdrew.

From that night, a marked alteration took place in his manner towards me. It was evident that the commendations bestowed upon me by Sir Alexander had ruined me in his eyes, and he considered me in the light of a formidable rival. He withdrew his confidence, and treated me with the most pointed neglect. But he could not well banish me from his table, or deprive me of the standing he had given me among his guests, without insulting them, by having introduced to their notice a person unworthy of it. On this head I was tolerably secure, as Mr. Moncton was too artful a man to criminate himself. In a few days I should now become of age, when the term of my articles would expire ; I should then be my own master ; and several private applications had been made to me by a lawyer

of eminence, to accept a place in his office, with promises of further advancement ; this rendered my uncle's conduct a matter of indifference. The sudden and unexpected return of Theophilus, gave a very different aspect to my affairs.

CHAPTER XIV.

LOVE AND HATRED.

At first Mr. Moncton refused to see his son ; but on the receipt of a letter from Theophilus, his positive orders on that head were not only reversed, but the *worthy* young gentleman was received with marked attention by his father.

The contents of that letter I did not know then, but got a knowledge of them in after years. The son had become acquainted with some villainous transactions of the parent, which he threatened to expose to the world, if any rigorous measures were adopted towards himself ; these revelations were of such a startling nature, that no alternative remained to Mr. Moncton but to submit, which he did, and with a wonderful good grace.

It would be no easy matter to describe the surprise and indignation of Theophilus Moncton, when he discovered that the despised and insulted Geoffrey had become a person of some consequence during his absence. I shall never forget the studied air of indifference, the chilling coldness, with which he met me on his return, and under the cover of which he endeavored to conceal his chagrin.

The long-cherished dislike that I had entertained for him, had lost much of its bitter character during a separation of many months. I was willing to believe that I might sometimes have

been the aggressor, and that time, and a more intimate knowledge of the world, might have produced a favorable change in his surly and morose disposition. I had still to learn that the world rarely improves the heart, but only teaches both sexes more adroitly to conceal its imperfections. I could perceive no alteration in Theophilus which gave the least promise of mental improvement. After a few minutes spent in his company, I found him more arrogant and conceited than when he bade adieu to his native shores. The affectation of imitating foreign manners, and interlarding his conversation with French and Italian, rendered him less attractive in his assumed, than he had been in his natural character.

I listened for the first week to his long, egotistical harangues, with tolerable patience, hoping that the theme of self would soon be exhausted, and the Frenchified dandy condescend to remember that he was an Englishman ; but finding him becoming more arrogant and assuming by listening to his nonsense, I turned from him with feelings of aversion, which I could but ill conceal. It must have been apparent, even to himself, that I considered his company a bore.

The sympathy that exists between kindred minds, all have experienced at some period of their lives ; but the mysterious chords of feeling which unite hearts formed by nature, to understand and appreciate each other, are not more electrical in their operation than those which have their origin in the darker passions of the human breast.

How repugnant to a sensitive mind, is a forced association with persons in whom we can find no affinity ; and whose sentiments and pursuits are at utter variance with our own.

I was acutely alive to these impressions, whenever I encountered the sidelong, watchful glance of my cousin. There was nothing straightforward in his soul ; he never looked friend or enemy honestly in the face. We mutually understood each other. Though he scrupulously avoided addressing his conver-

sation to me, yet, it was chiefly intended for my edification ; and was replete with spiteful and satirical invectives.

I detest this covert manner of attack ; it is mean and unfair in the highest degree, as it deprives the person attacked from taking his own part, and boldly defending himself. Theophilus was a perfect adept at this dastardly species of warfare.

I tried to treat his conduct with silent contempt ; but his provoking remarks galled me exceedingly ; and often, when I appeared unconscious of their being levelled against me, and earnestly engaged in the perusal of some dull law-book, I was listening to every word he uttered, and quivering with indignation in every limb. Theophilus enjoyed my discomfiture, and I found his powers of tormenting greater than I had at first imagined.

The second day after his arrival, he sent a message up to my room, to inform me that he required that apartment for his valet, and I could remove to a chamber in the next story.

I returned for answer, "That I should not quit the occupation of the room that had been allotted to my use by his father, until I received positive orders from him to that effect. But I should only require it a few days longer, and then, he could do as he pleased."

This insolent demand was not seconded by Mr. Moncton, and I took no further notice of it.

That my uncle had a game of his own to play, when he took me from the obscurity of the office and introduced me into society, I was now more than ever convinced. Whilst in the presence of his son he treated me with marked attention and respect, which rendered my situation far more trying and irksome, as I mistrusted the designs of the one and detested the other.

I felt that Mr. Moncton acted thus, on purpose to annoy Theophilus, and make him feel the weight of the resentment, which, for good reasons, he dared not openly express ; while he

praised my talents and application to business, on purpose to rouse the envy and hatred of my cousin.

One afternoon, as we were sitting over the dessert, Mr. Moncton, as usual, addressed his conversation exclusively to me, which irritated Theophilus to such a degree, that he turned suddenly to his father, and exclaimed with much violence :

“ You seem, sir, to forget you have a son ? ”

“ Yes, when that son forgot what was due to himself, and to his father’s house.”

“ You have to thank yourself for *that*,” was the insolent reply. “ I have trod too closely in your own footsteps, and followed too strictly the honest principles of my father.” He laughed bitterly. “ It seems strange, that you should be surprised, that such an example should have produced corresponding effects upon the mind and character of your son.”

Shocked at this horrible speech, for in spite of its awful truth, it seemed terrible from the mouth of a son, I looked from Theophilus to his father, expecting to see the dark eye of the latter, alive with the light of passion. But no—there he sat, mute as a marble statue ; it was frightful to contemplate the glossy stare of his glittering eye, the rigid immobility of his countenance.

“ God of Heaven ! ” I mentally exclaimed, “ can he be insulted in this manner by his only son, and remain thus calm ? ” But calm he was, without even attempting a reply, whilst the insolent wretch continued.

“ By heaven ! if you think that advancing that puppy into my place will bend me to your purpose, you grossly deceive yourself. I pity the stupid puppet who can thus sneak to his bitterest enemy, to obtain a position he could never rise to by his own merit. Silly boy !—I laugh at his folly—our shallow policy, and his credulity.”

The words were scarcely out of his mouth, when I sprang

from my chair, and with a well-directed blow, levelled him at my feet.

"Thank you, Geoffrey!" exclaimed Mr. Moncton, raising the crest fallen hero from the ground. "You have answered both for yourself and me."

"I have been too rash," I said, seeing the blood stream copiously from my cousin's nose; "but he exasperated me beyond endurance."

"He provoked it himself," returned Mr. Moncton. "I never blame any person when insulted, for taking his own part. You need be under no apprehension of a hostile encounter—Theophilus is a cowardly dog, he can bark and snarl, but dares not fight. Go to your room, Geoffrey, you will be better friends after this."

He said this in a tone of such bitter irony, that I hardly knew whether he was pleased with what I had done or offended, but who could fathom the mind of such a man? I instantly complied with his request, and felt, however mortifying to my pride, that Theophilus Moncton had uttered the truth.

"In another week," I cried, as I strode through the apartment—"yes, in less than a week, I shall obtain my majority—I shall be free, and then farewell to this accursed house of bondage for ever!"

Theophilus had not been home many days, before I perceived a decided alteration in the once friendly greetings I had been accustomed to receive from Mr. Moncton's guests. I was no longer invited to their parties, or treated with those flattering marks of attention which had been so gratifying to my vanity, and given me such an exalted idea of my own consequence.

At first, I was at a loss to imagine what had produced this sudden change. One simple sentence at length solved all these unpleasant queries, and pressed the unwelcome truth home to my heart. Robert Moncton had been reconciled to his son, and I was once more regarded as only a *poor relation*.

The day I made this important discovery, I had been detained at the office long after our usual dinner hour, and meeting with a friend on my way home, I sauntered with him several times up and down Regent street, before I returned to my uncle's house.

I was not aware that my uncle expected company that day, until informed by Saunders in the hall, that a large party were assembled in the dining-room.

I was a little provoked at not receiving any intimation of the event, and in being too late for appearing at dinner, the third course having been placed on the table ; but I hurried away to my own apartment to change my dress, and join the ladies in the drawing-room.

This important duty was scarcely effected, before Saunders entered with a tray covered with dainties, which he had catered for my benefit.

"I was determined, Mr. Geoffrey, that they should not have all the good things to themselves. Here is an excellent cut of salmon and lobster-sauce ; the plump breast of a partridge, and a slice of delicious ham—besides, the suukets. If you cannot make a good dinner off these, why, I says, that you deserves to be hungry."

And throwing a snowy napkin over a small table near the fire, he deposited the tray and its tempting contents thereon, placed my chair, and stood behind it with beaming eyes, his jolly, rosy face radiant with good-nature and benevolence.

I thanked him heartily for his attention to my comfort, and being tired and hungry, did ample justice to the meal he had provided.

"This party has been got up in a hurry, Saunders?"

"Not at all, sir. I carried out the invitations four days ago."

"You surprise me!" said I, dropping my knife and fork. "Four days ago—and I know nothing about it. That is something new."

"It is young Mr. Moncton's doings, sir. The party is given in honor of his return. Says Mr. Theophilus to the Guv'nor, says he, 'I shall say nothing to Geoffrey, about it. What a capital joke it will be, to see him bolt into the room without studying the Graces for an hour.' 'I think it was the Graces, he said, sir ; but whether its a law book, or a book of fashions, sir, hang me if I can tell."

"But why did not you give me a hint of this, my good fellow?"

"Why, sir," said Saunders, hesitating and looking down, "everybody in this world has his troubles, and I, sir, have mine. Trouble, sir, makes a man forget every one's affairs but his own ; and so, sir, the thing slipped quite out of my 'ead."

"And what has happened to trouble such a light heart as yours, Saunders?"

"Ah, sir !" sighing and shaking his head, "you remember Jemima, the pretty chamber-maid, who lives at Judge Falcon's, across the street, I am sure you must, sir, for no one that saw Jemima once could forget her ; and it was your first praising her that made me cast an eye upon her. Well, sir, I looked and loved, and became desperate about her, and offered her my 'onest 'and and 'eart sir, and she promised to become my wife. Yes, indeed, she did—and we exchanged rings, and lucky six-pences and all that ; and I gave master warning for next week ; and took lodgings in a genteel country-looking cottage on the Deptford road. But, I was never destined to find love there with Jemima."

"And what has happened to prevent your marriage?" said I, growing impatient and wishing to cut his long story down to the basement.

"Many a slip, sir, between the cup and the lip. There's truth in those old saws howsomever. Mr. Theophilus's French valet, poured such a heap of flummery into the dear girl's ears, that it turned her 'ead altogether, and she run off with the haffected

puppy last night ; but let him look well after himself, for I swear the first time I catch him, I'll make cat's meat of him. Ah, sir, the song says, that it's the men who is so cruelly deceitful, but I have found it the reverse. Never trust in vimen, sir ! I swear I'll hate 'em all from this day, for Jemima's sake."

"Consider yourself a fortunate fellow," said I. "You have made a very narrow escape."

"Ah, sir, it's all very well talking, when you don't feel the smart yourself. I loved that false creter with my 'ole 'art. But there's one thing (brightening up) which consoles me under this great haffliction, the annoyance that it has given to Mr. Theophilus. This morning, there was no one to dress him—to flatter his vanity and tell him what a fine gentleman he is—I had to carry up his boots and shaving water. It was rare fun to see him stamping and raving about the room, and vishing all the vimen in the world at the devil. But hark !—there's the dining-room bell. More wine. The ladies have just left for the drawing-room."

The blaze of lights, the gay assemblage of youth and beauty which arrested my eyes as Saunders threw back the folding-doors, sent a sudden thrill of joy to my heart. But these feelings were quickly damped by the cold and distant salutations I received from the larger portion of the company there assembled. Persons who a few weeks before had courted my acquaintance and flattered my vanity, by saying and doing a thousand agreeable things, had not a friendly word to offer.

The meaning glance which passed round the circle when I appeared among them, chilled the warm glow of pleasure which the sight of so many fair and familiar faces had called up.

What could be the meaning of all this. A vague suspicion flashed into my mind, that my cousin was the direct cause of this change in the aspect of affairs, and, sick and disgusted with the world, I sat down at a distant table and began mechanically to turn over a large portfolio of splendid prints that I had not

noticed before—and which I afterwards discovered, had been brought by Theophilus from Paris.

A half suppressed titter from two young ladies near me, and which I felt was meant for me, stung my proud heart to the quick. A dark mist floated between me and the lights; and the next moment, I determined to leave the room in which I felt that my presence was not required, and where I was evidently regarded as an intruder.

I had just risen from my seat to effect a quiet retreat, when the folding-doors were again thrown open, and Mrs. Hepburn and Miss Lee were announced.

What were these strangers to me? The new arrival appeared to make no small sensation. A general bustle ensued, and my eyes unconsciously followed the rest.

The blood receded from my cheeks, to flush them again to a feverish glow, when I instantly recognized the lovely girl and her aunt, who I had for so many months sought for, and sought in vain.

Yes it was her—my adored Catherine—no longer pale and agitated from recent danger, but radiant in youth and beauty, her lovely person adorned with costly jewels, and the rich garments that fashion has rendered indispensable to her wealthy votaries.

“Miss Lee,” was whispered among the ladies near me.

“Mr. Moncton’s ward?”

“The rich heiress.”

“Do you think her handsome?”

“Yes—passable.”

“Too short.”

“Her figure pretty—but insignificant.”

“She is just out.”

“So I hear. She will not make any great sensation. Too sentimental and countrified. As Lord Byron says—‘Smells of bread and butter.’”

This last spiteful remark, I considered a compliment. My charming Kate, looked as fresh and natural as a new-blown rose with the morning dew still fresh upon its petals. There was nothing studied or affected about her—no appearance of display—no effort to attract admiration ; she was an unsophisticated child of nature, and the delightful frankness, with which she received the homage of the male portion of the company, was quite a contrast to the supercilious airs of the fashionable belles.

The opinion of the gentlemen with regard to the fair *débutante*, was quite the reverse of those given by her own sex.

“What a lovely girl.”

“What an easy graceful carriage.”

“Did you ever see a more charming expression—a more bewitching smile ? A perfect lady from head to foot.”

“I have lost *my* heart already.”

“By Jove ! won’t she make a noise in the gay world ?”

“The beauty of the season.”

“A prize, independent of her large fortune.”

“And doubly a prize with.”

And thus the men prated of her among themselves.

The excitement at length subsided ; and favored by the obscurity of my situation, I could watch at a distance all her movements, and never tire of gazing upon that beaming face.

By some strange coincidence, I could hardly think it purely accidental, Mrs. Hepburn and her niece came up to the table upon which I was leaning.

I rose up in confusion, wondering if they would recognize me, and offered the elder lady my chair.

In my hurry and agitation, the portfolio fell from my hand, and the fine prints were scattered over the floor and table.

A general laugh arose at my expense—I felt annoyed, but laughed as loudly as the rest. Miss Lee, very good-naturedly assisted me in restoring the prints to their place, then looking earnestly in my face for a few seconds, she said—“Surely, I

am not deceived—you are the gentleman who rescued me from that frightful situation in Oxford street?"

"The same," said I, with a smile.

"How delighted I am to meet you once more, my brave preserver," she cried, giving me her hand, and warmly shaking mine; "I was afraid that I should never see you again. And your name—you must tell me your name."

"Geoffrey Moncton. But, Miss Lee, do not distress me by thinking so much of a trifling service, which gave me so much pleasure."

"Trifling, do you call it. Mr. Geoffrey Moncton, you saved my life, and I never can forget the debt of gratitude I owe you. Aunt—turning to Mrs. Hepburn—do you remember this gentleman? How often we have talked that adventure over, and wondered who my preserver was. It is such a pleasure to see him here."

The old lady, though not quite so eloquent as her niece, was kind enough in her way. Wishing to change the subject, I asked Miss Lee if she drew?"

"A little."

"Let us examine these beautiful prints."

I gave her a chair, and leant over her. My heart fluttered with delight. I forgot my recent mortification. I was near her, and, in the rapture of the moment, could have defied the malice of the whole world.

"I am no judge of the merits or demerits of a picture," she said, in her sweet, gentle voice. "I know what pleases me, and suffer my heart to decide for my head."

"That is exactly my case, Miss Lee. A picture to interest me, must produce the same effect upon my mind as if the object represented was really there. This is the reason, perhaps, why I feel less pleasure in examining those pictures by the ancient masters, though portrayed with matchless skill, that represent the heathen deities. With Jupiter, Mars and Venus, I can feel

little sympathy, while the truthful and spirited delineations of Wilkie and Gainsborough, which have been familiar from childhood, strike home to the heart."

Before Miss Lee could reply, Theophilus Moncton walked to the table at which we were talking. He stared at me, without deigning a word of recognition, and shook hands cordially with Miss Lee and her aunt.

"Happy to see you here, Catherine—was afraid you would be too much fatigued, after dancing all night, to give us a look in this evening. Been admiring my prints? Splendid collection, ain't they? By-the-by, Mr. Geoffrey, I would thank you to be more careful in handling them. Persons unaccustomed to fine drawings, are apt to injure them by rough treatment."

A contemptuous glance was my reply, which was returned by a sidelong withering glare of hate.

"That picture, on the opposite side of the room," continued my tormentor, anxious to divert Miss Lee's attention from me, "is a fine portrait, by Sir Thomas Lawrence. You are an admirer of his style; let us examine the picture nearer; I want to have your opinion of it."

They crossed the room. In a few seconds, a large group gathered before the picture of which Theophilus and Miss Lee formed the nucleus, and half a dozen wax-lights were held up to exhibit it to the best advantage.

Theophilus was eloquent in praising Lawrence's style of painting, and entertained the company with an elaborate detail of all the celebrated paintings he had seen abroad; the studios he had visited, and the distinguished artists he had patronized. The fellow could talk well, when he pleased, on any subject, and possessed considerable talent and taste for the arts; yet, I thought him more egotistical and affected than usual, when standing beside the simple and graceful Catherine Lee.

She listened to him with politeness, until the gratuitous lecture came to an end, and then quietly resumed her seat at the

table by me, with whom she entered into a lively conversation.

The swarthy glow of indignation mounted to my cousin's wan face. He drew back, and muttered something inaudibly between his shut teeth, while I secretly enjoyed his chagrin. When supper was announced I had the honor of conducting Miss Lee down stairs, leaving my cousin to take charge of the elder lady. Nor did my triumph end here. Catherine insisted on taking a seat at the lower end of the table, and I found myself, once more, placed by her side.

"I do detest upper seats at feasts and synagogues," said she, "it exposes you to observation, while in our pleasant obscurity we can enjoy a little friendly chat. I never could understand why so many ladies quarrel so much about taking precedence of each other."

"It is only ambition in a small way," said I.

"Very small, indeed," she continued, laughing. "But tell me, why you were not at Mrs. Wilton's large party last night?"

"Simply, because I was not invited."

"The Monctons were there, father and son. But, perhaps you mix very little in the gaieties of the town."

"Since Theophilus returned, I have been very little from home; and have become a mere cipher with my old friends. A few weeks ago, these Wiltons courted my acquaintance, and the young men vied with each other, in paying me attention. To-night, we met as perfect strangers. To me, the change is unaccountable. I am, however, a perfect novice in the ways of the world. Such examples of selfish meanness often repeated, will render me a misanthrope."

"You must not condemn all, because you have experienced the unmerited neglect of a few," said Catherine. "Selfish, interested people are found in every community. It is a maxim with me, never to judge the mass by individuals. Many of the persons we meet with in the world do not live entirely for it,

and are incapable of the conduct you deplore. I have met with warm hearts and kind friends amid the gay scenes you condemn.—young people, who like myself, are compelled by circumstances to mingle in society, while their thoughts and affections are far away.”

“You have never experienced the frowns of the world,” I said, “I can scarcely allow you to be a competent judge.”

“I am prepared to meet them,” she replied, quickly—then stopped—and sighed deeply. I looked up inquiringly.

The expression of her fine face was changed from a cheerful to a pensive cast. It was not actual sorrow that threw a shade over her clear brow, but she looked as if she had encountered some unexpected misfortune, and was prepared to meet it with resignation. She passed her small white hand slowly across her forehead, and I thought I saw tears trembling in her eyes. My interest was deeply excited, and I loved her better for having suffered. I redoubled my attentions, and before the company rose from table, I fancied that she no longer regarded me with indifference.

From this happy dream, I too soon awoke to an agonizing consciousness of my own insignificance.

A Counsellor Sabine, who had been conversing with my uncle during the greater part of the evening, beckoned me over to a distant part of the room, and I reluctantly obeyed the summons.

He wanted me to settle a dispute between him and Mr. Moncton, relative to some papers, which he said, had been entrusted to my care.

My place by Catherine Lee’s side, was instantly filled by Theophilus.

Mrs. Hepburn, Catherine’s aunt, asked him in a low voice, which, occupied as I was with other matters, did not fail to reach my ears, who I was, and the station I held in society, and ended her remarks, by passing sundry encomiums on my person and accomplishments.

"*Accomplishments!*" repeated Theophilus, with a sneer. "I know not how he should be accomplished, Mrs. Hepburn. He is a poor clerk in my father's office; and as to his standing in society, that is something new to me. He is a natural son of my uncle Edward's, whom my father adopted into the family, and brought him up out of charity. I was surprised at him, an uninvited guest, daring to address his conversation to Miss Lee."

It was well for the dastard, that he was protected by the presence of ladies, and beyond the reach of my arm, or I certainly should have committed an act of violence—perhaps murder.

I restrained my indignation, however, and appeared outwardly calm—received some instructions from the counsellor and noted them down with stoical precision. My hand did not tremble, my passion was too terrible for trifling demonstrations. I could have put a pistol to his head, and seen him bleeding at my feet, without feeling one pang of remorse.

Miss Lee's carriage was announced. I roused myself from a dream of vengeance, and offered my arm to conduct her down stairs. She cast upon me a look of sorrowful meaning, and her aunt refused my services with a distant bow.

I drew proudly back. "This," I thought, "is their gratitude. This is like the rest of the world."

Mrs. Hepburn gave her hand to Theophilus, and with a grin of triumph he led them out.

After the company had separated I went up to Theophilus, and demanded an explanation of his ungentlemanly conduct. The answer I received was an insolent laugh.

No longer able to restrain my feelings, I poured upon him the boiling rage of my indignation, and did and said many bitter things, that had been better unsaid. He threatened to complain of me to his father. I dared him to do his worst—and left the room in a state of dreadful excitement.

The next morning, while busy in the office, Mr. Moncton came in, and closed the door carefully after him.

I rose as he entered and stood erect before him. I knew by the deadly pallor of his face, that something decisive was about to take place.

"Geoffrey," he said, in a low, hoarse voice, which he vainly endeavored to make calm, "you have grossly insulted my son, and spoken to him in the most disrespectful terms of me, your friend and benefactor. Without you will make a full and satisfactory apology to me for such intemperate language, and ask his pardon, you may dread my just displeasure."

"Ask his pardon!" I cried; almost choking with passion—"for what? For his treating me like a menial and a slave!—Never, Mr. Moncton, never!"

My uncle regarded me with the same icy glance which froze my blood when a child, while I recapitulated my wrongs, with all the eloquence which passion gives. Passion which makes even the slow of speech act the part of an orator.

He listened to me, with a smile of derision.

Carried beyond the bounds of prudence, I told him, that I would no longer be subjected to such degrading tyranny—that his deceitful conduct had cancelled all ties of obligation between us—that the favors lately conferred upon me, I now saw, had only been bestowed to effect my ruin—that he had been acting a base and treacherous game with me to further his own dishonest views—that I was fully aware of his motives, and appreciated them as they deserved. That he well knew the story of my illegitimacy was a forgery, that I had the means to prove it one, and would do it shortly. That the term of my articles would expire on the following day, and I would then leave his house for ever and seek my own living."

"You may do so to-day, he replied, in the same cool sarcastic tone; and unlocking his desk he took out the indentures.

A sudden terror seized me. Something in his look threatened

danger—I drew a quicker breath, and advanced a few paces nearer.

All my hopes were centered in that sheet of parchment, to obtain which, I had endured seven years of cruel bondage. “No, no,” I said, mentally—he cannot be such a villain—he dare not do it !”

The next moment the fatal scroll lay torn and defaced at my feet.

A cry of despair burst from my lips—I sprang forward and with one blow laid him senseless at my feet and fled from the house.

I saw Robert Moncton but once again. Recollection shudders when I recall that dreadful meeting.

I walked rapidly down the street, perfectly unconscious that I was without my hat, and that the rain was falling in torrents ; or that I was an object of curiosity to the gaping crowds that followed me.

Some one caught my arm.

I turned angrily round to shake off the intruder—it was my friend Harrison.

“In the name of Heaven, Geoffrey, tell me what has happened ! What is the matter—are you in your right senses ? Have you quarrelled with your uncle ? Let me return with you to the house,” were questions he asked in a breath.

“*My uncle !* He is an infernal scoundrel !” I exclaimed, throwing out my clenched hand, and hurrying on still faster. “Oh, that I could crush him with one blow of this fist !”

“Geoffrey, you are mad—do you know what you say ?”

“Perfectly well—stand back, and let me kill him !”

He put his arm forcibly round me. “Calm yourself, dear Geoffrey. What has caused this dreadful excitement ? Good God ! how you tremble. Lean upon me—heavier yet. The arm of a sincere friend supports you—one who will never desert you, let what will befall.”

"Leave me, George, to my fate. I have been shamefully treated, and I don't care a —— what becomes of me !"

"If you are unable to take care of yourself, Geoffrey," he replied, clasping my hand fervently in his own, and directing my steps down a less frequented street, "it is highly necessary that some one should, until your mind is restored to its usual tranquillity. Return with me to my lodgings ; take a composing draught and go to bed. Your eyes are bloodshot, and starting from your head for want of sleep."

"Sleep ! how is it possible for me to sleep, when the blood is boiling in my veins, and my brain is on fire, and I am tempted every moment to commit an act of desperation ?"

"This feverish state cannot last, my poor friend ; these furious bursts of passion must yield to exhaustion. Your knees bend under you. In a few minutes we shall be beyond public observation, and can talk over the matter calmly."

As he ceased speaking, a deadly faintness stole over me—my head grew giddy, the surrounding objects swam round me in endless circles and with surprising rapidity, the heavens vanished from my sight, and darkness, blank darkness closed me in, and I should have fallen to the earth, but for the strong arm that held me in its grasp.

When I again opened my eyes, it was in the identical apothecary's shop into which, some months before, I had carried the fainting Catherine Lee. My old enemy, the little apothecary, was preparing to open a vein in my arm. This operation afforded me instant relief ; my fury began to subside, and tears slowly trickled down my cheeks.

George, who was anxiously watching every change in my countenance, told the shop-boy to call a coach, which conveyed me in a few minutes to his old lodgings in Fleet street.

CHAPTER XV.

GEORGE HARRISON TELLS HIS HISTORY.

MANY days passed over me of which I was totally unconscious. A violent fever had set in, and I was not aware of my situation; scarcely of the bodily sufferings I endured. My wants were ministered to by the kindest, truest friend that ever blessed and soothed the miseries of the unfortunate.

Fancying myself still under the control of Robert Moncton, and a resident beneath his roof, I raved continually of my wrongs, and exhausted myself by threats of vengeance.

Long before the crisis of the fever was passed, George had gathered from my impotent ravings the story of my injuries.

After fluctuating a long time between life and death, youth and a naturally strong constitution conquered my malady, and I once more thought and felt like a rational creature.

My indignation against my uncle and cousin subsided into a sullen, implacable hatred, to overcome which I tried, and even prayed in vain. Ashamed of harboring this sinful passion, I yet wanted the moral courage and Christian forbearance, to overcome what reason and conscience united to condemn.

Degraded in my own estimation, I longed, yet dreaded to confide to the generous Harrison, that the man he loved and attended with such devotion, was capable of such base degeneracy—of entertaining sentiments only worthy of Robert Moncton and his son.

The violence of my disorder had reduced me to such a state of weakness that I imagined myself at the point of death, when

I was actually out of danger. My nervous system was so greatly affected that I yielded to the most childish fears, and contemplated dying with indescribable horror.

Harrison, who was unacquainted with the state of my mind, attributed these feelings to the reaction produced by the fever ; and thinking that a state of quiescence was necessary for my recovery, seldom spoke to me but at those times when, with tenderness almost feminine, he gave me food and medicine, arranged my pillows, or made affectionate inquiries about my bodily state.

I often pretended to be asleep, while my mind was actively employed in conjuring up a host of ghastly phantoms, which prevented my recovery, and were effectually undermining my reason.

One afternoon, as I lay in a sort of dreamy state, between sleeping and waking, and mournfully brooding over my perishing hopes and approaching dissolution, I thought that a majestic figure clothed in flowing garments of glistening white, came to my bedside, and said to me in tones of melodious sweetness, "Poor, perishing, sinful child of earth, if you wish to enter Heaven, you must first forgive your enemies. The gate of Life is kept by Love, who is ready to open to every one who first withdraws the bar which Hatred has placed before the narrow entrance."

Overwhelmed with fear and astonishment, I started up in the bed, exclaiming in tones of agonized entreaty, "Oh God, forgive me ! I cannot do it !"

"Do what, dearest Geoffrey ?" said George, coming to the bedside, and taking my hand in his.

"Forgive my enemies. Forgive those wretches who have brought me to this state, and by their cruel conduct placed both life and reason in jeopardy. I cannot do it, though He, the merciful—who dying forgave his enemies—commands me to do so."

"Geoffrey," said Harrison, tenderly, "you can never recover your health, or feel happy till you can accomplish this great moral victory over sin and self."

"I cannot do it," I responded, turning from him, and burying my face in the bed-clothes while I hardened my heart against conviction. "No—not if I go to —— for refusing. I feel as if I were already there."

"No wonder," returned Harrison, sternly. "Hatred and its concomitant passion, Revenge, are feelings worthy of the damned. I beseech you, Geoffrey, by the dying prayer of that blessed Saviour, whom you profess to believe, try to rise superior to these soul-debasing passions; and not only forgive, but learn to pity the authors of your sufferings."

"I have done my best. I have even prayed to do so."

"Not in a right spirit, or your prayers would have been heard and accepted. What makes you dread death? Speak the truth out boldly. Does not this hatred to your uncle and cousin stand between you and Heaven?"

"I confess it. But, Harrison, could you forgive them?"

"Yes."

"Not under the same provocation?"

"I have done so under worse."

"God in Heaven!—how is that possible?"

"It is true."

"I won't believe it," said I, turning angrily upon the pillow. "It is not in human nature—and few can rise above the weakness of their kind."

"Listen to me, Geoffrey," said Harrison, seating himself on the side of the bed. "You wished very much, at one time, to learn from me the story of my past life. I did not think it prudent at that time, and while under Robert Moncton's roof, to gratify your curiosity. I will do so now, in the hope of beguiling you out of your present morbid state of feeling, while it may answer the purpose of teaching you a good, moral lesson, which I trust you will not easily forget."

“Man’s happiness depends in a great measure on the sympathy of others. His sufferings, by the same rule, are greatly alleviated when contrasted with the miseries of his neighbors, particularly, if their sorrows happen to exceed his own.

“Much of my history must remain in the shade, because time alone can unravel the mystery by which I am surrounded; and many important passages in my life, prudence forces me to conceal. But, my dear fellow, if my trials and sufferings will in any way reconcile you to your lot, and enable you to bear with fortitude your own, your friend will not have suffered and sinned in vain.”

George adjusted my pillows, and gave me my medicine, stirred the fire to a cheerful blaze, and commenced the narrative that for so many months I had so ardently longed to hear.

HARRISON’S STORY.

“Perhaps, Geoffrey, you are not aware, that your grandfather left Sir Robert Moncton, the father of the present Baronet, guardian and trustee to his two sons, until they arrived at their majority. Edward at the time of his death, being eighteen years of age, Robert a year and a half younger.

“What tempted Geoffrey Moncton, to leave his sons to the guardianship of the aristocratic father, from whom he had parted in anger many years before, no one could tell.

“The Baronet was a very old man, and was much reputed in his day; and it is possible that the dying merchant found by experience, that he could place more reliance on the honor of a gentleman, than in a man of business. Or it might be, that on his death-bed, he repented of the long family estrangement, and left his sons to the care of their grandfather, as a proof that all feelings of animosity were buried in his grave.

“Sir Robert’s eldest son had been dead for some years, and the present Baronet, who resided with his grandfather, was just

two years older than your father, and for several years the cousins lived very amicably beneath the same roof—were sent to the same college in Oxford to finish their studies and mingle in the same society.

“It was unfortunate for your father, who had too little ballast to regulate his own conduct, that he contracted the most ardent friendship for the young Alexander, who was a gay, reckless, dissipated fellow, regarding his wealth as the source from which he derived all his sensual pleasures, and not as a talent committed to his stewardship, of which he must one day give an account.

“Sir Alexander’s early career, though not worse than that of many young men of the same class, was unmarked by any real moral worth. His elegant person, good taste, and graceful manners, won for him the esteem and affection of those around him. Frank, courteous, and ever ready to use his influence with Sir Robert, in mitigating the distress of his poor tenants, he was almost adored by the lower classes, who looked up to him as to a God, and by whom, in return, they were treated with a degree of familiarity, much beneath his dignity as a gentleman.

“From this extravagant, kind-hearted, and popular young man, Edward Moncton contracted those habits that terminated in his ruin.

“Congeniality of mind strongly attached the cousins to each other; and I am certain that Sir Alexander truly loved the frank, confiding, careless Edward Moncton, while he equally disliked the cold, calculating, money-getting propensities of his brother Robert. Robert possessed a disposition not likely to forget or forgive a slight; and he deeply resented the preference shown to his brother; and his hatred, though carefully concealed, was actively employed in forming schemes of vengeance.

“You well know, how Robert Moncton can hate; the depths of guile, and the slow, smooth words, with which he can conceal the malignity of his nature, and hide the purposes of his heart.

He had a game too to play, from which he hoped to rise up the winner ; and to obtain this object he alternately flattered and deceived his unconscious victims.

“The particulars of your father’s quarrel with Sir Alexander I never knew ; it took place just before the young men left college and became their own masters ; but it was of such a nature that they parted in anger, never to meet again.

“Shortly after this quarrel old Sir Robert died ; and Alexander Moncton came in for the estates and title. Your father and uncle, both being now of age, entered upon the great business of life. Your father resumed the business bequeathed to him by his father, and your uncle entered into partnership with the firm, of which he now stands the head and sole proprietor.

“Several years passed away. The only intercourse between the families, was through Sir Alexander and his cousin Robert, who, in spite of the young Baronet’s aversion, contrived to stick to him like a bur, until he fairly wriggled himself into his favor.

“At thirty, Sir Alexander still remained a bachelor, and seemed too general an admirer of the sex to resign his liberty to any particular belle.

“About this period of my story one of Sir Alexander’s game-keepers was shot by a band of poachers, who infested the neighborhood. Richard North, the husband of Dinah, had made himself most obnoxious to these lawless depredators, and thus fell a victim to his over zeal.

“Sir Alexander considered himself bound in honor to provide for the widow and her daughter of his faithful servant, particularly as the former had been left without any means of support. Both mother and daughter were received into his service—Dinah as housekeeper at the Hall, and her daughter Rachel as upper chamber-maid.

“Dinah, at that period, was not more than thirty-four years of age, and for a person of her class, was well educated and

uncommonly handsome. I see you smile, Geoffrey, but such was the fact.

"Rachel, who was just sixteen, was considered a perfect model of female beauty, by all the young fellows who kept Bachelors' Hall with Sir Alexander.

"The young Baronet fell desperately in love with his fair dependent, and the girl and her mother entertained hopes that he would make her his wife.

"Great credit is due to Sir Alexander, that he never attempted to seduce the girl, who was so completely in his power. Pride, however, hindered him from making her Lady Moncton. In order to break the spell that bound him he gave the mother a pretty cottage on the estate, and a few acres of land rent free, and went up to London to forget, amid its gay scenes, the bright eyes that had sorely wounded his peace.

"Dinah North was not a woman likely to bear with indifference, the pangs of disappointed ambition. She bitterly reproached her daughter for having played her cards so ill, and vowed vengeance on the proud lord of the manor, in curses loud and deep.

"Rachel's character, though not quite so harshly defined, possessed too much of the malignant and vindictive nature of the mother. She had loved Sir Alexander with all the ardor of a first youthful attachment. His wealth and station were nothing to her, it was the man alone she prized. Had he been a peasant, she would have loved as warmly and as well. Lost to her for ever, she overlooked the great pecuniary favors just conferred upon her mother and herself, and only lived to be revenged.

"It was while smarting under their recent disappointment that these women were sought out and bribed by Robert Moncton to become his agents in a deep-laid conspiracy, which he hoped to carry out against Sir Alexander and his family.

"Robert Moncton was still unmarried, and Dinah took the

charge of his establishment, being greatly enraged with her beautiful daughter for making a run-away match with Roger Mornington, Sir Alexander's huntsman, who was a handsome man, and the finest rider in the county of York.

"After an absence of five years, Sir Alexander suddenly returned to Moncton Park, accompanied by a young and lovely bride. During that five years, a great change had taken place in the young Baronet, who returned a sincere Christian and an altered man.

"Devotedly attached to the virtuous and beautiful lady whom he had wisely chosen for his mate, the whole study of his life was to please her, and keep alive the tender affections of the noble heart he had secured.

"They loved—as few modern couples love; and Sir Alexander's friends—and he had many—deeply sympathized in his happiness.

"Two beings alone upon his estate viewed his felicity with jealous and malignant eyes—two beings, who, from their lowly and dependent situations, you would have thought incapable of marrying the happiness which excited their envy. Dinah North had been reconciled to her daughter, and they occupied the huntsman's lodge, a beautiful cottage within the precincts of the park. Dinah had secretly vowed vengeance on the man who, from principle, had saved her child from the splendid shame the avaricious mother coveted. She was among the first to offer her services, and those of her daughter, to Lady Moncton. The pretty young wife of the huntsman attracted the attention of the lady of the Hall, and she employed her constantly about her person, while in cases of sickness, for she was very fragile, Dinah officiated as nurse.

"A year passed away, and the lady of the manor and the wife of the lowly huntsman were both looking forward with anxious expectation to the birth of their first-born.

"At midnight, on the 10th of October, 1804, an heir was

given to the proud house of Moncton ; a weak, delicate, puny babe, who nearly cost his mother her life. At the same hour, in the humble cottage at the entrance of that rich domain, your poor friend, George Harrison (or Philip Mornington, which is my real name) was launched upon the stormy ocean of life."

At this part of Harrison's narrative I fell back upon my pillow and groaned heavily.

George flew to my assistance, raising me in his arms and sprinkling my face with water.

"Are you ill, dear Geoffrey?"

"Not ill, George, but grieved—sick at heart, that you should be grandson to that dreadful old hag."

"We cannot choose our parentage," said George, sorrowfully. "The station in which we are born, constitutes fate in this world ; it is the only thing pertaining to man over which his will has no control. We can destroy our own lives, but our birth is entirely in the hands of Providence. Could I have ordered it otherwise, I certainly should have chosen a different mother."

He smiled mournfully, and bidding me to lie down and keep quiet, resumed his tale.

"The delicate state of Lady Moncton's health precluded her from nursing her child ; my mother was chosen as substitute, and the weakly infant was entrusted to her care. The noble mother was delighted with the attention that Rachel bestowed upon the child, and loaded her with presents. As to me—I was given into Dinah's charge, who felt small remorse in depriving me of my natural food, if anything in the shape of money was to be gained by the sacrifice. The physicians recommended change of air for Lady Moncton's health. Sir Alexander fixed on Italy as the climate most likely to benefit his ailing and beloved wife.

"My mother was offered large sums to accompany them, which she steadfastly declined. Lady Moncton wept and

entreated, but Rachel Mornington was resolute in her refusal. 'No money,' she said, 'should tempt her to desert her husband and child, much as she wished to oblige Lady Moncton.'

"The infant heir of Moncton was thriving under her care, and she seemed to love the baby, if possible, better than she did her own. Sir Alexander and the physician persuaded Lady Moncton, though she yielded most reluctantly to their wishes, to overcome her maternal solicitude, and leave her child with his healthy and affectionate nurse.

"She parted from the infant with many tears, bestowing upon him the most passionate caresses, and pathetically urging Rachel Mornington not to neglect the important duties she had solemnly promised to perform.

"Three months had scarcely elapsed before the young heir of Moncton was consigned to the family vault; and Sir Alexander and his wife were duly apprised by Robert Moncton, who was solicitor for the family, of the melancholy event.

"That this child did not come fairly by his death I have strong reasons for suspecting, from various conversations which I overheard when a child, pass between Robert Moncton, Dinah North, and my mother.

"The news of their son's death, as may well be imagined, was received by Sir Alexander and Lady Moncton with the most poignant grief; and six years elapsed before she and her husband revisited Moncton Park.

"My mother was just recovering from her confinement with a lovely little girl—the Alice, to whom you have often heard me allude—when Sir Alexander and Lady Moncton arrived at the Hall. They brought with them a delicate and beautiful infant of three months old.

"I can well remember Lady Moncton's first visit to the Lodge, to learn from my mother's own lips the nature of the disease which had consigned her son to his early grave.

"I recollect my mother telling her that the little George went

to bed in perfect health, and died in a fit during the night, before medical aid from the town of —— could be procured. She shed some tears while she said this, and assured Lady Moncton that the baby's death had occasioned her as much grief as if he had been her own. That she would much rather that I had died than her dear nurse-child.

"I remember, as I leant against Dinah North's knees, thinking this very hard of my mother, and wondering why she should prefer Lady Moncton's son to me. But, from whatever cause her aversion sprang, she certainly never had any maternal regard for me.

"Lady Moncton drew me to her, and with her sweet, fair face bathed in tears, told my mother that I was a beautiful boy—that her darling would have been just my age and size, and that she could not help envying her her child. She patted my curly head, and kissed me repeatedly, and said that I must come often to the Hall and see her, and she would give me pretty toys and teach me to read.

"Ah, how I loved her! Her kind, gentle voice was the first music I ever heard. How I loved to sit at her feet when she came to the cottage, and look up into her pale, calm face; and when she stooped down to kiss me, and her glossy ringlets mingled with mine, I would fling my arms about her slender neck, and whisper in a voice too low for my stern mother and Dinah to hear:—

"‘I love you a thousand, thousand times better than anything else in the world. Oh, how I wish I were your own little boy.’

"Then the bright tears would flow fast down her marble cheeks, and she would sigh so deeply, as she returned with interest my childish passionate caresses.

"Ah, Geoffrey, my childish heart spoke the truth—I loved that high-born, noble woman better than I have since loved aught in this cold, bad world—at least, my affection for her was of a purer, holier character.

“My mother was taken home to the Hall, to act as wet nurse to little Margaret ; and I remained at the cottage with my harsh, cross grandmother, who beat me without the slightest remorse for the most trifling faults, often cursing and wishing me dead, in the most malignant manner.

“My father, whom I seldom saw, for his occupation took him often from home, which was rendered too hot for comfort, by the temper of his mother-in-law, was invariably kind to me. When he came in from the stables he would tell me funny stories, and sing me jolly hunting songs ; and what I liked still better, would give me a ride before him on the fine hunters he had under his care ; promising that when I was old enough, I should take them airing round the park, instead of him.

“My poor father ! I can see him before me now, with his frank, good-natured face, and laughing blue eyes ; his stalwart figure, arrayed in his green velvet hunting coat, buckskin breeches and top boots ; and the leather cap, round which his nut-brown hair clustered in thick curls ; and which he wore so jauntily on one side of his head. Roger Mornington was quite a dandy in his way, and had belonged to a good old stock ; but his father ran away when a boy, and went to sea, and disgraced his aristocratic friends ; and Roger used to say, that he had all the gentlemanly propensities, minus the cash.

“He doated upon me. ‘His dear little jockey !’ as he used to call me ; and I always ran out to meet him when he came home, with loud shouts of joy. But there came a night, when Roger Mornington did not return ; and several days passed away, and he was at length found dead in a lonely part of the park. The high-spirited horse he rode, had thrown him, and his neck was broken by the fall—and the horse not returning to the stables, but making off to the high road, no alarm had been excited at the absence of his rider.

“My mother was sincerely grieved for his death ; he was a kind, indulgent husband to her ; and it was the first severe pang of sorrow that my young heart had ever known.

"The day after his funeral, I was sitting crying beside the fire, holding my untasted breakfast on my knee.

" 'Don't take on so, child,' said my mother, wiping the tears from her own eyes. 'All the tears in the world won't bring back the dead.'

" 'And will dear daddy never come home again?' I sobbed. 'Ah, I have no one to love me now, but the dear good lady up at the Hall!'

" 'Don't I love you, Philip?'

" 'No!' I replied, sorrowfully, 'you don't love me, and you never did.'

" 'How do you know that?'

" 'Because you never kiss me, and take me up in your lap, as Lady Moncton does, and look at me with kind eyes, and call me your dear boy. No, no, when I come for you to love me, you push me away, and cry angrily, 'Get away, you little pest! don't trouble me!' and grandmother is always cursing me, and wishing me dead. Do you call *that* love?'

" I never shall forget the ghastly smile that played around her beautiful stern mouth, as she said unconsciously, aloud to herself:

" 'It is not the child, but the voice of God, that speaks through him. How can I expect him to love me?'

" How I wondered what she meant. For years that mysterious sentence haunted my dreams.

" I was soon called to endure a heavier grief. Lady Moncton's health daily declined. She grew worse—was no longer able to go out in the carriage, and the family physician went past our house many times during the day, on his way to the Hall.

" Old Dinah and my mother were constantly absent attending upon the sick lady, and I was left in charge of a poor woman who came over to the cottage to clean the house, and take care of little Alice, while my mother was away.

"One day my mother came hastily in. She was flushed with walking fast, and seemed much agitated. She seized upon me, washed my face and hands, and began dressing me in my Sunday suit.

" 'A strange whim this, in a dying woman,' she said, to the neighbor, 'to have such a craze for seeing other people's children. Giving all this trouble for nothing.'

"After a good deal of pushing and shaking she dragged me off with her to the Hall, and I was introduced into the solemn state chamber, where my kind and noble friend was calmly breathing her last.

"Ah, Geoffrey, how well I can recall that parting hour, and the deep impression it made on my mind. There, beneath that sumptuous canopy, lay the young, the beautiful—still beautiful in death, with Heaven's own smile lighted upon her pale serene face. God had set his holy seal upon her brow. The Merciful, who delighteth in mercy, had marked her for his own.

"Ah, what a fearful contrast to that angelic face was the dark fierce countenance of Dinah North, scowling down upon the expiring saint, and holding in her arms the sinless babe of that sweet mother.

"Rachel Mornington's proud handsome features wore their usual stern expression, but her face was very pale, and her lips firmly compressed. She held, or rather grasped me by the hand, as she led me up to the bed.

" 'Is that my little Philip?' said the dying woman in her usual sweet tones. But the voice was so enfeebled by disease as to be only just audible."

" 'It is my son, my lady,' replied Rachel, and her voice slightly faltered.

" 'What says my love?' asked Sir Alexander, raising his head from the bed-clothes in which his face had been buried to conceal his tears.

" 'Lift the boy up to me, dearest Alick, that I may kiss him once more before I die.'

"Sir Alexander lifted me into the bed beside her, and raised her up gently with his other arm, so that both she and I were encircled in his embrace. My young heart beat audibly. I heard Lady Moncton whisper to her husband.

" 'Alexander, he is your child. Ah, do not deny it now. You know, I love you *too* well to be jealous of you. Just tell me the honest truth ?'

"A crimson glow spread over her husband's face, as, in the same hurried whisper, he replied, 'Dearest Emilia, the likeness is purely accidental. I pledge to you my solemn word, that he is not my son.'

The poor lady looked doubtingly in his face. I saw, a bitter scornful smile pass over the rigid features of my mother ; whilst I, foolish child, was flattered with the presumption that I might possibly be Sir Alexander's son.

" 'Do not cry Philip, my darling boy !' said Lady Moncton, holding me close to her breast. 'Sir Alexander will be a father to you for my sake. I am very happy my dear child ; I am going to Heaven, where my own sweet baby went before me ; I shall meet him there. Be a good boy, and love your mother, and your pretty little sister ; and above all, my dear child, love your Saviour, who can lead you through the dark valley of the shadow of death, as gently as he is now leading me. Should you live to be a man,' she added faintly, 'remember this hour, and the lady who loved and adopted you as her son.'

"Then turning slowly towards her husband, she wound her thin transparent hands about his neck ; breathed a few words of love in his ear, unheard by aught save him and me ; and reclining her meek pale face upon his manly breast, expired without a struggle.

"A deep solemn pause succeeded. I was too awestruck to weep. The deep convulsive sobs that burst from the heart of the bereaved husband warned intruders to retire. My mother led me from the chamber of death, and we took our way in

silence across the park ; the solemn toll of the death-bell floated through its beautiful glades.

“ ‘Mother,’ I said ; clinging to her dress. ‘What is that ?’

“ ‘The voice of death, Philip. Did you not hear that bell toll for your father. It will one day toll for me—for you—for all.’

“ ‘How I wish, mother, that that day would soon come.’

“ ‘Silly boy ! Do you wish us all dead ?’

“ ‘Not you mother, nor granny. You may both live as long as you like. But when it tolls for me, I shall be in Heaven with dear Lady Moncton.’

“ Rachel started, stopped suddenly, and fixed upon me a mournful gaze—the only glance of tenderness that ever beamed upon me from those brilliant, stern eyes.

“ ‘Poor child—you may have your wish gratified only too soon. Did Robert Moncton or Dinah North know of your existence, the green sod would not lie long unpiled upon your head. You think I do not love you, Philip !’ she cried, passionately—‘I do, I do, my poor child. I have saved your life, though you think me so cross and stern.’

“ She knelt down beside me on the grass, flung her arms round me, and pressed me convulsively to her bosom, whilst big bright tears fell fast over my wondering countenance.

“ ‘Mother,’ I sobbed, ‘I do love you sometimes—always, when you speak kindly to me, as you do now ; and I love dear little Alice—ah, so much ! my heart is full of love—I cannot tell you how much.’

“ Rachel redoubled her weeping—a step sounded behind us—she sprang to her feet, as Dinah North, with the little Margaret Moncton in her arms, joined us.

“ ‘What are you doing there, Rachel ?’ growled forth the hard-hearted woman. ‘Are you saying your prayers, or admiring the beauty of your son. Hang the boy ! though he is your child, I never can feel the least interest in him !’

“ ‘Is that his fault or yours?’ said my mother, coldly.

“ ‘Ah, mine, of course,’ returned Dinah, bitterly. ‘We are not accountable for our likes or dislikes. I hate the boy!’

“ ‘I looked at her with defiance in my eyes, and she answered my look with a sharp blow on the cheek. ‘Don’t look at me, young dog, in that insolent way. I have tamed prouder spirits than yours, and I’ll tame yours yet.’

“ ‘My mother gave her an angry glance, but said nothing, and we walked slowly on. At last Dinah turned to her and said :

“ ‘Rachel, this should be a proud and joyful day to you.’

“ ‘In what respect, mother?’

“ ‘Your rival’s dead ; you have gained your liberty, and Sir Alexander is free to choose another wife. Do you understand me now?’

“ ‘Perfectly ; but that dream is past,’ said my mother, mournfully. ‘Sir Alexander loved that dead angel too well, to place a woman of my low degree in her place. If he did not unite his destiny to mine when I was young and beautiful, and he in the romance of life, don’t flatter yourself into the belief that he will do it now. I know human nature better.’

“ ‘You don’t know your own power,’ said Dinah ; ‘beauty is stronger than rank and fortune, and you are still handsome enough to do a deal of mischief among the men, if you only set about it in the right way.’

“ ‘Peace, mother ! I need none of your teaching. I learned to love Mornington, and ceased to love Sir Alexander. Nay, I am really sorry for the death of poor Lady Moncton, and should despise her husband if he could forget her for one like me.’

“ ‘Fool ! idiot !’ exclaimed Dinah, in a tone of exasperation. ‘You have ever stood in the way of your own fortune. Had you not been so over squeamish you might have changed the children, and made your own son the heir of the Moncton. Had I been at home, this surely would have been done. This was all the good I got by leaving you to the guidance of a handsome, good-natured fool like Mornington.’

“ ‘Mother, speak more respectfully of the dead,’ said Rachel. ‘He was *good*, at any rate, which we *are not*. It was my intention to have changed the children, but God ordered it otherwise,’ she continued, with a convulsive laugh. ‘However, I have had my revenge, but it has cost me many a blighting thought.’

“ ‘I don’t understand you,’ said Dinah, drawing close up before us, and fixing a keen look of inquiry on her daughter.

“ ‘Nor do I mean that you should,’ coldly retorted Rachel. ‘My secret is worth keeping. You will know it one day too soon.’

“We had now reached home, and the presence of the strange woman put an end to this mysterious conversation. Though only a boy of eight years old, it struck me as so remarkable, that I never could forget it ; and now, when years have gone over me, I can distinctly recall every word and look that passed between those sinful women. Alas, that one should have been so near to me.

“But you are sleepy, Geoffrey. The rest of my mournful history will help to wile away the tedium of the long to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XVI.

GEORGE HARRISON CONTINUES HIS HISTORY.

“THE sorrows of my childhood were great,” continued George, “but still they were counterbalanced by many joys. In spite of the disadvantages under which I labored, my gay, elastic spirit surmounted them all.

“Naturally fearless and fond of adventure, I never shrunk from difficulties, but felt a chivalrous pride in endeavoring to overcome them. If I could not readily do this at the moment,

I lived on in the hope that the day would arrive when by perseverance and energy, I should ultimately conquer.

"I have lived to prove that of which I early felt a proud conviction ; that it is no easy matter for a wicked person, let him be ever so clever and cunning, to subdue a strong mind, that dares to be true to itself.

"Dinah North felt my superiority even as a child, and the mortifying consciousness increased her hatred. She feared the lofty spirit of the boy that her tyrannical temper could not tame ; who laughed at her threats, and defied her malice, and who, when freed from her control, enjoyed the sweets of liberty in a tenfold degree.

"Sir Alexander put me to a school in the neighborhood, where I learned the first rudiments of my mother tongue, writing, reading, and simple arithmetic.

"The school closed at half-past four o'clock in the afternoon ; when I returned to the Lodge, for so the cottage was called in which we resided, and which stood just within the park at the head of the noble avenue of old oaks and elms that led to the Hall.

"Two of the loveliest, sweetest children nature ever formed were always at the Park gates watching for my coming, when they ran to meet me with exclamations of delight, and we wandered forth hand in hand to look for wild fruit and flowers among the bosky dells and romantic uplands of that enchanting spot.

"Alice Mornington and Margaretta Moncton were nearly the same age, born at least within three months of each other, and were six years younger than I.

"Strikingly different in their complexion, appearance and disposition, the two little girls formed a beautiful contrast to each other.

"Alice was exquisitely fair, with large, brilliant, blue eyes, like my poor mother's, and long silken ringlets of sunny hair which curled naturally upon her snow-white shoulders. She was tall and stately for her age, and might have been a princess, for the

noble dignity of her carriage would not have disgraced a court.

"She was all life and spirit. The first in every sport, the last to yield to fatigue or satiety. Her passions were warm and headstrong ; her temper irritable ; her affections intense and constant, and her manners so frank and winning that while conscious that she had a thousand faults, you could but admire and love her.

"A stranger might have thought her capricious, but her love of variety arose more from the exuberance of her fancy than from any love of change. She was a fair and happy child, the idol of her fond brother's heart, till one baneful passion marred what God and nature made so beautiful.

"Margaret Moncton, outwardly, was less gifted than Alice Mornington, but she far surpassed her foster-sister in mental endowments. Her stature was small, almost diminutive. Her features neither regular nor handsome except the dark eyes, the beauty of which I think I never saw surpassed.

"Her complexion was pure but very pale, and her lofty, thoughtful brow wore a serious expression from infancy. In our wildest revels on the green sward, you seldom heard Margaret laugh ; but when pleased, she had a most bewitching smile, which lighted up her calm countenance till every feature beamed with an inexpressible grace. Her face was the mirror of purity and truth, and you felt, whilst looking upon it, that it was impossible for Margaret to deceive.

"How could I be unhappy, while I had these two beautiful children for my daily companions, and the most charming rural scenery at my immediate command ?

"Sir Alexander came every day to the Lodge to see his child, and always lavished upon me the most flattering marks of his favor.

"His manner to my mother was, at first, shy and reserved. This wore off by degrees, and before two years had expired,

from the death of his wife, his visits became so constant, and his attentions so marked, that Dinah once more began to entertain hopes that her ambitious schemes for her daughter might yet be realized.

“These hopes were only frustrated by the sudden death of the object for whom they were cherished.

“My mother, for some weeks, had complained of an acute pain in her left side, just under her breast, and the medicines she procured from the doctor afforded her no relief.

“She grew nervous and apprehensive of the consequences, but as her personal appearance was not at all injured by her complaint, Dinah ridiculed her fears.

“‘You may laugh as you please, mother,’ she said, the very day before she died, ‘but I feel that this pain will be the death of me—and I so unfit to die,’ she added, with a deep sigh.

“‘Nonsense!’ returned Dinah, ‘you will wear your wedding clothes a second time, before we put on your shroud.’

“My mother only answered with another deep-drawn sigh. She passed a sleepless night—the doctor was sent for in the morning, gave her a composing draught, and told her to make her mind easy, for she had nothing to fear.

“I always slept in the same bed with my mother. That night I had a bad cold and could not sleep; but knowing that she was not well, I lay quite still, fearing to disturb her. She slept well during the early part of the night. The clock had just struck twelve when she rose up in the bed, and called Dinah to come to her quickly. Her voice sounded hollow and tremulous.

“‘What ails you, Rachel?’ grumbled the hard woman; ‘disturbing a body at this hour of the night.’

“‘Be it night or morning,’ said my mother, ‘I am dying, and this hour will be my last.’

“‘Then, in the name of God! send for the doctor.’

“‘It is too late now. He can do me no good—I am going

fast ; but there is something on my mind, mother, which I must tell you before I go. Sit down beside me on the bed, whilst I have strength left to do it, and swear to me, mother, that you will not abuse the confidence I am about to repose in you.'

"Dinah nodded assent.

" 'That will not do. I must have your solemn word—your oath !'

" 'What good will that do, Rachel ? no oath can bind me—I believe in no God, and fear no devil !'

"This confession was accompanied by a hideous, cackling laugh. Rachel groaned aloud.

" 'Oh, mother ! there is a God—an avenging God ! Could you feel what I now feel, and see what I now see, like the devils, you would believe and tremble. You will know it one day, and like me, find out that repentance comes too late. I will, however, tell the plain truth, and your diabolical policy, will, doubtless, suggest the use which may be made of such an important secret.'

"There was a long pause, after which some sentences passed between them, in such a low voice, that I could not distinctly hear them ; at last I heard my mother say,

" 'You never saw these children, or you would not wonder that my heart so clave to that fair babe. You thought that I accepted Robert Moncton's bribe, and put the other child out of the way.'

" 'And did you not ?' cried the eager old woman, breathless with curiosity.

" 'I took the bribe. But the child died a natural death, and I was saved the commission of a frightful crime, which you and your master were constantly writing to me, to urge me to commit. Now, listen, mother.'

"What she said was in tones so low, that, though I strained every nerve to listen, as I should have done, had it been a

ghost story, or any tale of horror, the beating of my own heart frustrated all my endeavors.

“Rachel’s communication appeared to astonish her mother. Her dark, wrinkled brows contracted until not a particle of the eyes were visible, and she sat for a long while in deep thought, rocking herself to and fro on the bed, whilst the dying woman regarded her with expanded eyes and raised hands, locked tightly together. At last she spoke.

“‘Dinah ! make no ill use of my confidence, or there will come a day of vengeance for both you and me. What shall we gain by being tools in the hands of a wicked man like Robert Moncton. Why should we sell our souls for naught, to do his dirty work.’

“‘Not to serve him will I do aught to injure the child. No, no. Dinah North is not such a fool. If I do it to gratify my own revenge, that’s another thing. I have this bad, bold Robert in my power. This secret will be a fortune in itself—will extort from his mean, avaricious soul, a portion of his ill-gotten wealth. Ha, my child ! you did well and wisely, and may die in peace, without the stain of blood upon your soul.’

“Rachel shook her head despondingly.

“‘There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked. My soul consented to the crime, and whilst the thought was uppermost in my heart, the bolt of the Almighty smote me, and my resolution wavered ; but, the guilt, at this moment, appears to me the same. It is a dreadful thing to die without hope. Where is Alice ?’

“‘Sleeping. Shall I bring her to you ?’

“‘Let her sleep. I feel sleepy, too. Smooth my pillow, mother. Give me a little water. I feel easy now. Perhaps, I shall awake in the morning better.’

“The pillows were arranged—the draught given ; but the sleeper never awoke again.

“Her mysterious communications, which only came by halves

to my ears, filled my mind with vague conjectures, and I cannot help thinking, to this hour, that the young heir of Moncton came to an untimely death, and she blamed herself so bitterly for not having made me supply his place.

“Stern as my mother had been during her life, her death was a severe blow to us all, especially to Alice and me ; as it removed from our humble home an object most dear to us both, the little lady of the manor, to whom we had ever given the endearing name of sister.

“After Margaret left us, how dull did all our pastimes appear. Alice and I wandered sadly and silently among our old haunts ; the song of the birds cheered us no longer ; the flowers seemed less fair ; the murmur of the willow-crowned brook less musical ; the presiding genius of the place had vanished ; we felt that we were alone.

“I had now reached my fourteenth year, and Sir Alexander, true to the promise made to his wife, sent me to an excellent school in the city of York. Here I made such good use of my time, that before three years had elapsed I was second boy in the head class, and had won the respect of the master and ushers. My munificent patron was greatly pleased with the progress I had made, and hinted at sending me to college, if I continued to deserve his good opinion.

“Ah, Geoffrey ! those were halcyon days, when I returned to spend the vacations at the Lodge, and found myself ever a welcome visitor at the Hall.

“With a proud heart I recounted to Sir Alexander, all my boyish triumphs at school, and the good baronet listened to my enthusiastic details with the most intense interest, and fought all his juvenile battles over again, with boyish ardor, to the infinite delight of our admiring audience, Margaret and Alice. The latter spent most of her time with Miss Moncton, who was so much attached to her foster-sister, and shed so many tears at parting from her, that Sir Alexander yielded to her earnest

request for Alice to remain with her, and the young heiress and the huntsman's blooming daughter were seldom apart. Miss Moncton's governess, an amiable and highly accomplished woman, took as much pains in teaching Alice as she did in superintending the education of her high-born pupil. The beautiful girl acquired her tasks so rapidly, and with such an intense desire for improvement, that Sir Alexander declared, that she beat his Madge hollow.

"Dinah North exulted in the growing charms of her granddaughter. If the old woman regarded anything on earth with affection, it was the tall, fair girl so unlike herself. And Alice, too—I have often wondered how it were possible—Alice loved with the most ardent affection, that forbidding-looking, odious creature.

"To me, since the death of my mother, she had been civil but reserved—never addressing me without occasion required—and I neither sought nor cared for her regard.

"It was on the return of one of those holidays, when I returned home full of eager anticipations of happiness, of joyous days spent at the park in company with Margaret and Alice, that I first beheld that artful villain, Robert Moncton.

"It was a lovely July evening. The York coach set me down at the Park gates, and I entered the pretty cottage with my scanty luggage on my back, and found the lawyer engaged in earnest conversation with my grandmother.

"Struck with the appearance of the man, which at first sight is very remarkable, I paused for some minutes on the threshold, unobserved by the parties. Like you, Geoffrey, I shall never forget the impression his countenance made upon me. The features so handsome, the coloring so fine, the person that of a finished gentleman; and yet, all this pleasing combination of form and face marred by that cold, cruel, merciless eye. Its expression so dead, so joyless, sent a chill through my whole frame, and I shrank from encountering its icy gaze, and was

about quietly to retire by a back door, when my attention was arrested by the following brief conversation.

“‘I should like to see the lad.’

“‘We expect him home from school by the coach to-night.’

“‘What age is he?’

“‘Just sixteen.’

“‘What does Sir Alexander mean to do for him?’

“‘Send him to college, I believe. He is very fond of him.’

“‘Humph!—and then to London to make a lawyer of him. Leave him to me, Dinah, I will make a solicitor of him in earnest. I have taught many a bold heart and reckless hand to solicit the charity of others.’

“‘Devil doubt you!’ rejoined the fiend with a hollow, cackling laugh. ‘But you may find the boy one too many for you, with all your cunning. He’ll not start at shadows, nor stumble over straws. I have tamed many a proud spirit in my day—but this boy defies my power. I fear and hate him, but I cannot crush him. But hush!—here he is.’

“‘I bustled forward and flung my portmanteau heavily to the ground. ‘How are you, grandmother? How’s Alice? All well, I hope?’

“‘Do you see the gentleman, Philip?’

“‘Gentleman! I beg his pardon. A fine evening, sir; but very hot and dusty travelling by the coach. I have not tasted anything since breakfast, grandmother; and I am tired and hungry.’

“‘Yours is the hungry age,’ said the lawyer, staring me full in the face, as if he was taking a proof impression for legal purposes. His cold, searching look brought the blood to my cheeks, and I returned the impertinent scrutiny with a glance of defiance.

“‘He rose; nodded meaningly to Dinah, bowed slightly to me, and left the cottage.

“‘The next minute Alice was in my arms.

“ ‘Brother! dear, darling brother! welcome, welcome a thousand times.’

“Oh, what a contrast to the dark, joyless countenance of Dinah North, was the cherub face of Alice—laughing in the irresistible glee of her young heart. I forgot my long, tiresome journey, dust, heat, and hunger, as I pulled her on my knee, and covered her rosy cheeks with kisses.

“ ‘What news since I left, Alice?’

“ ‘Sad news, Philip. Dear Madge is in London on a visit to her aunt; and there is a dull, cross boy staying at the Hall, with a very hard name—Theophilus Moncton—Margaret’s cousin. But he is nothing like her, though he calls her his little wife. But Madge says that she will never have him, though his father is very rich.’

“ ‘I am sure *you will* hate him, Philip, for he calls us beggar’s brats, and wonders that Sir Alexander suffers his daughter to play with us. I told him that he was very rude; and that he had better not affront you, for you would soon teach him better manners. But he only sneered at me, and said, “My father’s a *gentleman*. He never suffers me to associate with people *beneath* us. Your brother had better keep out of my way, or I will order my groom to horsewhip him.” I felt very angry and began to cry, and Sir Alexander came in and reproved the boy, and told me I had better return to grandmama until Mr. Moncton and his son had left the Hall.’

“While little Alice, ran on thus to me, I felt stung to the quick; and all the pride of my nature warring within. For the first time in my life, I became painfully conscious of the difference of rank that existed between me and my benefactor; I was restless and unhappy, and determined not to go near the Hall, until Sir Alexander bade me to do so himself.

“But days passed, and I saw nothing of the good Baronet, and Alice and I were obliged to content ourselves by roaming through all the old, beloved haunts, and talking of Margaret.

We were returning one evening through the fine avenue of oaks, that led to the front entrance of the demesne, when a pony rushed past us at full gallop. A boyish impulse, tempted me to give a loud halloo, in order to set the beautiful animal off at its wildest speed. In a few minutes we met a lad of my own age, booted and spurred, with a whip in his hand, running in the same direction the pony had taken. He was in a towering passion, and coming up to us, he cried out, with a menacing air—

“ ‘You impudent rascal! how dared you to shout in that way, to frighten my horse, when you saw me endeavoring to catch him?’

“ ‘I saw no such thing,’ I replied, drily. ‘I admired the pony, and shouted to see how much faster he could run.’

“ ‘You deserve a good thrashing,’ quoth he. ‘Go and catch the horse for me, or I will complain to Sir Alexander of your conduct.’

“ ‘Sir Alexander is not my master, neither are you. I shall do no such thing.’

“ ‘Do it instantly!’ stamping with his foot.

“ ‘Do it yourself. You look quite as fit for a groom as I do.’

“ ‘I tried to pass him, but he stepped into the centre of the path, and hindered me. To avoid a collision was now impossible.

“ ‘You insolent young blackguard!’ he cried, ‘do you know that you are speaking to a gentleman?’

“ ‘*Indeed!*’ I said, with a provoking smile. ‘I ought to thank you for the information, for I never should have suspected the fact.’

“ ‘With a yell of rage, he struck me in the face with the butt end of his whip. I sprang upon him with the strength of a tiger, and seizing his puny form in my arms, I dashed him beneath my feet, and after bestowing upon him sundry hearty kicks, rejoined the terrified Alice, and left Mr. Theophilus

Moncton, to gather up his fallen dignity, and make the best of his way home to the Hall.

"This frolic cost me far more than I expected. The next morning, Sir Alexander rode over to the Lodge, and severely reprimanded me for my conduct; and ended his lecture, by affirming in positive terms, that if I did not beg his young relative's pardon, he would withdraw his favor from me for ever.

"This, I proudly refused to do—and the Baronet as proudly told me, 'To see his face no more!'

"I looked sorrowfully up as he said this. The tears were in my eyes, for I loved him very much—but my heart was too full to speak.

"He leant down from his horse, expecting my answer—I was silent—the color mounted to his cheeks—he waited a few minutes longer—I made no sign, and he struck the spurs into his horse, and rode quickly away.

"'There goes my only friend!' I cried. 'Curse the mean wretch, who robbed me of my friend! I only regret I did not kill him!'

"Thus, for one boyish act of indiscretion I was flung friendless upon the world. Yet, Geoffrey, were the thing to do again, I feel, that I could not, and would not, act otherwise.

"Time has convinced me that Robert Moncton, acting with his usual policy, had made Sir Alexander ashamed of his connection with us, and he gladly availed himself of the first plausible excuse to cast me off. Alice deeply lamented my disgrace; but the whole affair afforded mirth to my grandmother, who seemed greatly to enjoy my unfortunate triumph over the boy with the *hard name*.

CHAPTER XVII.

HARRISON FINDS A FRIEND IN NEED.

"DURING my residence at school in York, my master was often visited by a wealthy merchant who bore the same name with myself. This man was an old bachelor, very eccentric, but universally esteemed as one of the most benevolent of men. He was present at one of the school examinations in which I took many prizes, and asking my name he found out that he was related to my father, and bestowed upon me many marks of favor, such as presenting me with useful books, and often asking me over to his house to dine, or spend the evening.

"Flattered by his attentions to me, I had lost no opportunity of increasing our friendship, and I determined to apply to him in my present distress.

"I was a perfect novice in the art of letter-writing, never having penned an epistle in my life, and after making several attempts with which I was perfectly disgusted, I determined to walk over to the city and make my application in person to Mr. Mornington.

"Without communicating my intentions to Alice, I carefully tied up a change of linen in a silk handkerchief, and with the mighty sum of five shillings in my pocket, commenced my pedestrian journey of thirty odd miles.

"I started in the morning by day-break, and without meeting with any particular adventures on the road, I arrived at six o'clock in the evening, foot-sore and weary at the rich man's door. When there, my heart, which had been as stout as a lion's on the road, failed me, and I sat down upon the broad

stone steps that led up to the house, horribly depressed and uncertain what course to take.

"This I knew, would not do—the night was coming on, and the rain which had threatened all day now began to fall fast. Making a desperate effort, I sprang up the steps, and gave a gentle knock—so gentle, that it was unheard; and unable to summon sufficient courage to repeat the experiment, I resumed my seat until some more fortunate applicant should seek admittance.

"Not many minutes elapsed, before the quick loud rap of the postman brought Mrs. Jolly, the housekeeper, to the door; and edging close to him of the red jacket, I asked in a tremulous voice—"If Mr. Mornington was at home?"

"'Why, dearee me, master Philip, is that you?' said the kind woman, elevating her spectacles—"who would have thought of seeing you t'night?"

"'Who indeed. But, my dear Mrs. Jolly, is Mr. Mornington disengaged, and can I see him?"

"'He is t'home, and you can speak to him, but not just now. He's to his dinner, and doan't like to be disturbed. But come this way, an I'll tell him you are here.'

"'Who's that you are speaking to, Mrs. Jolly?' cried my worthy old friend as we passed the dining-room door, through which the footmen were carrying an excellent dinner to table.

"'Only Mr. Philip, sir.'

"'Mr. Philip!' and the next moment, the old man came out and grasped me warmly by the hand. 'Why lad, what brings you back to school so soon—tired of play already, hey?'

"'No sir. I fear play will soon tire of me. I am to go to school no more.'

"'Sorry to hear that, Phil. Just the time when instruction would be of the most service to you; you would learn more in the ensuing year, than in all that have gone before it. Leave school—no, no, I must see you the head boy in it yet.'

"'It was my ambition, sir. But you know I am only a poor

orphan lad, entirely dependent on the bounty of Sir Alexander Moncton. I have offended this gentleman, and he will do no more for me ; and I walked from the Park to-day to ask your advice as to what course I had better pursue, and in what way I am most likely to earn my own living.'

"The old gentleman looked grave.

"'Offended Sir Alexander ? You must have acted very imprudently to do that, and he so kind to you. Walked all the way from Moncton. Bless the boy, how tired and hungry you must be. Sit down, young Philip Mornington, and get your dinner with old Philip Mornington ; and we will talk over these matters by and bye.'

"Gladly I accepted the dear old gentleman's hearty invitation. I had not tasted food since early dawn, and was so outrageously hungry and eat with such a right good will, that he often stopped and laughed heartily at my voracity.

"'Well done, Philip ! Don't be ashamed—hold in your plate for another slice of beef. Thirty miles of hard walking at this season of the year, may well give a boy of sixteen, strong and healthy like you, a good appetite.'

"After the cloth was drawn, and the old gentleman had refreshed me with a couple of glasses of excellent wine, obedient to his request, I related to him my adventure with Theophilus Moncton in the park, and its unfortunate result.

"Instead of blaming me, the whole affair seemed greatly to amuse the hearty old man. He fell back in his chair, and chuckled and laughed until he declared that his sides ached.

"'And was it for punishing that arrogant puppy as he deserved, that Sir Alexander cast you, my fine fellow, from his favor ?'

"'He might have forgiven that. It was for refusing so positively his commands, in not asking young Moncton's pardon.'

"'If you had obeyed him in this instance, Philip, you would have forfeited my good opinion for ever, and would have

deserved to have been kicked by Sir Alexander's lackeys for your meanness. Don't look so cast down, boy. I honor you for your self-respect and independence. You have other friends besides Sir Alexander Moncton, who will not forsake you for taking your own part like a man. You shall go to school yet—ay, and become the head scholar in Dr. Trimmer's head class, and finish your education at Oxford, or my name is not Philip Mornington.'

"How well did this excellent, warm-hearted, generous man perform his promise—how ill I profited by the education he gave me, and the wealth he bequeathed to me at his death, the subsequent portion of my history will reveal.

"I went to school at the end of the vacation, but as a day-boarder; Mr. Mornington having told me to consider his house as my future home.

"A boy that came from our village to Dr. Trimmer's school, told me that Sir Alexander's passion soon cooled, and he rode over to the Lodge a week after I left, to inquire after his old pet, and was surprised and exasperated to find the bird flown, and taken by the hand by a man for whom he had a great personal antipathy; who had ever opposed him in politics, and had twice carried an election against him.

"There was enough of revenge in my composition to feel glad that Sir Alexander was annoyed at my good-fortune.

"The next year saw me at college, with a handsome allowance from my generous patron, to enable me to establish my claims as a gentleman. I will pass over the three years I spent at this splendid abode of science, where learning and vice walk hand in hand.

"The gratitude I felt for all Mr. Mornington had done for me, for a long time restrained me from indulging in the wild excesses which disgraced the conduct of most of the young men with whom I associated. This reluctance, however, to do and countenance evil, gradually wore off, and I became as wild and dissipated as the rest.

"I formed many agreeable acquaintances at college, but one only who really deserved the name of a friend. Kind, gentle and studious, Cornelius Laurie (for so I shall call him) mingled very little with his fellow students ; his health being delicate, he spent most of his leisure hours in walking, an exercise of which he was particularly fond, and in which I generally participated.

"His mild, intelligent countenance first won my regard. I sought his acquaintance, found him easy of access, friendly and communicative, and always anxious to oblige every one as far as lay in his power. Commanding an excellent income, he was always ready to assist the improvident who had expended theirs, and with such a disposition, you may be certain, that the calls upon his purse were by no means few. He formed a strong attachment to me, and we usually spent most of our time together.

"Cornelius invited me to pass the Christmas vacation with him in town. When at home he resided with his aunt, a widow lady who had brought up his only sister, who had been left an orphan at a very early age. Charlotte Laurie was several years younger than her brother ; and in speaking of her, he had always told me that she was a very pretty girl, I was not prepared to behold the beautiful and fascinating creature to whom I was introduced.

"Charlotte Laurie was a child of nature, without display or affectation ; conscious of her great personal attractions only so far as to render her more agreeable—for what beautiful woman was ever ignorant of her charms ? My pretty Lotty knew perfectly the power they gave her over the restless and inconstant heart of man, but she did not abuse it.

"My passions, Geoffrey, by nature, are as warm and impetuous as your own, and they soon betrayed me into love ; and I thought that the fair girl to whom I had lost my heart was not insensible to the passion she had inspired. But when I recalled my obscure parentage, of which Cornelius was perfectly ignorant ; and the uncertainty of my future prospects, I felt

that it would be dishonorable in me to advance my suit to the young lady.

"To remain in the house and keep silent upon a subject so important to my peace, I found would be impossible; and I feigned a letter from Mr. Mornington, whom I called my uncle, requiring my immediate presence in York.

"My departure caused great regret to the family. Cornelius remonstrated; Mrs. H—— questioned the necessity of my journey; Charlotte said nothing, but left the room in tears. Strongly tempted as I was to stay, I remained firm to my original purpose, and bade adieu to my amiable friends, without breathing a word even to Cornelius of my attachment for his sister.

"On my way to York I called at my old home, and was received with the most lively demonstrations of joy by Alice, whom I found a blooming girl of fifteen.

"Old Dinah told me, as she scowled at my handsome dress and improved appearance, 'That she supposed I was now too fine a gentleman to call her grandmother, or Alice sister?'

"I assured her that my improved circumstances had not changed my heart, nor made me ashamed of my old friends.

"Something, I fear, in my looks, contradicted my words, for she turned from me with a scornful smile.

"'The world,' she said, 'was a good school for teaching people the art of falsehood.'

"Her sarcasms made me very uncomfortable—for my conscience convicted me of their truth—and turning to Alice I begged her to tell me the news, for I was certain a great deal must have happened in the neighborhood during the four years I had been absent.

"'No,' said Alice; 'we go on much as usual. Sir Alexander and Margaret are very kind to me, and I go every day up to the Hall. But she is Miss Moncton now—and I am plain Alice Mornington. Mr. Theophilus is often there; and he is so

much improved, Philip, you would never know him. He is no longer proud and disagreeable, but so affable and kind, and always sees me safe home to the Lodge. People say that he is to marry Miss Moncton ; but I don't believe a word of it. He does not love her I am certain—for he told me so a few days ago ; and that he thought me a thousand times handsomer than his cousin !

“While Alice run on thus, I kept my eyes fixed upon her beautiful face ; and from the heightening of her color when speaking of Theophilus, I was convinced, that young as she was, she was not insensible to his flattery. Anxious to warn her of her danger, I drew her arm through mine, and we strolled together into the park.

“‘Dear Alice,’ I said, affectionately ; ‘do you love your brother as well as you used to do in years long past?’

“‘Philip, do you doubt my love?’ she answered, reproachfully.

“‘Not in the least, Alice. I know your heart to be warm and true ; but years make great changes. Four years have fled away since we met, and you are nearly grown into a woman. Perhaps you will be angry with me if I venture to give you a little brotherly advice.’

“‘Not without you scold me too much.’

“‘My lecture, Alice, I will confine to a few words. Do not listen, dear child, to the flattering speeches of Theophilus Moncton. He means you no good.’

“‘How can you know that?’ she said, quickly.

“‘From the general character which the man bears. From my own experience of him when a boy. Avoid his company ; he means to deceive you.’

“‘Philip, you wrong him, indeed, you do!’ she cried, with flashing eyes. ‘He never talks to me of love, he only seeks to be my friend. I am too young to think of love. I don't know what being in love is—but I do feel very grateful to one so

much richer and better than me, and who is heir to all these beautiful groves, and that fine old Hall, taking such an interest in my welfare—particularly,’ she added, with great emphasis on her words, ‘after he received such unworthy treatment from a brother of mine.’

“ ‘ You surely do not mean what you say, Alice ?’

“ ‘ I never say what I do not mean ; and if you come back to us, Philip, only to quarrel with us, you had better have stayed away.’

“ For a few minutes I felt terribly annoyed ; but when I recollected that these words fell from the lips of a spoilt child, I restrained my anger, in the hope of saving her from the ruin I feared might be impending over her.

“ ‘ Alice, you are a simple, little girl ; as such I forgive you. You are not aware of the danger to which you are exposed. Young people are so ignorant of the treachery of the world, and so confident in their own strength to resist temptation, that they easily fall into the snares laid for them by wicked and designing men. If you persist in receiving the attentions of this man, who would consider it the utmost degradation to make you his wife, I, as your brother and natural protector, will consider it my duty to remove you from this place.’

“ ‘ I will not go !’ she cried ; stopping suddenly and looking me in the face with an air of defiance. ‘ You are not your own master yet, much less mine. I shall remain here with my dear, old grandmother, as long as she lives. And let me tell you, Mr. Philip, I am as competent to manage my own affairs as you are !’

“ Could this be Alice ?

“ I looked at her, and looked again. The beauty of her countenance seemed changed. I turned from her with a deep sigh.

“ ‘ Oh, Alice, sister Alice ! I tremble for you ; so young and so vindictive. This is not my Alice, the happy, confiding Alice, who once loved me so tenderly.’

“‘I did love you, Philip, very much,’ she replied, in a softened voice; ‘but how was my love returned? You quarrelled with the only friend we had in the world. One, too, who had done so much for us. To whose bounty we were indebted for a home and daily bread; for the clothes we wore, for the instruction we received—who treated us in every respect more like his own children, than the poor recipients of his noble generosity. You forgot all this. You insolently refused to apologize to his young relative, the heir of his title and wealth, for having grossly insulted him, and left your home and his protection without bidding this dear sister, for whose well-doing you are so deeply concerned, and who shared in your disgrace, one short farewell.’

“‘Alice, Alice!’

“‘Hush, sir; hear me to the end, if you please. You acted more ungratefully still, when you sought employment from one of Sir Alexander’s bitterest enemies; and never wrote a single line either to your injured patron or to us. Was this love? Young as I am, Philip Mornington, I could not have been guilty of such baseness. I despise your conduct—and advice comes very ill from a person who could be guilty of such.’

“She turned haughtily away—and I, Geoffrey, I stood overwhelmed with confusion and remorse. I had never seen my conduct in this light before. I had all along imagined myself the injured party, and looked upon Sir Alexander as an unreasonable persecutor. But I felt at that moment, as I stood humbled before that proud girl, that I had not acted right—that some concession was due on my part to the man from whom I had received so many benefits; and but for very shame I would have sought his presence, acknowledged my error, and entreated his pardon.

“Oh, why does this stubborn pride so often stand between us and our best intentions. I let the moment pass, and my heart remained true to its stern determination, not to yield one inch

of what I falsely termed independence. My reverie was dispelled by Alice. She took my hand kindly.

“ ‘ You look grave, Philip. I have put these serious thoughts into your head, and you feel sorry for the past. My anger is all gone. I forgive you from my very heart. So give me a kiss, and let us be friends. But no lectures if you please for the future. I will not stand a scolding—not even from you. You need not fear that I shall disgrace you—I am too proud to place myself in the power of any one. I like, yes, I love Theophilus Moncton, but he will never make a fool of me, or any one else. But—hush—here is Miss Moncton.’ ”

“ The blood crimsoned my face as a sudden turning in the woodland path, brought me within a few paces of one who at that moment I would gladly have shunned. To retreat was impossible. I raised my hat, and with her usual frankness, Margaret held out her hand.

“ I pressed it respectfully between my own without venturing to raise my eyes to her face. She perceived my confusion, and doubtless defined the cause.

“ ‘ You have been a sad truant, Philip. But you are welcome home. I, for one, rejoice to see my dear foster brother again.’ ”

“ ‘ Is that possible ? ’ I stammered out—‘ Dear Miss Moncton, I am only too happy to be allowed to plead for myself—I feel that I have sinned against my good and generous benefactor ; that this kindness on your part, is wholly undeserved. What shall I do to regain your good opinion.’ ”

“ ‘ Say nothing at all about it, Geoffrey. It was a boyish fault, and my father has often repented that he treated it so seriously. For my own part, I do not blame you for thrashing Theophilus ; had I been provoked in the same manner, and a lad of your age, I would have done it myself. My quarrel with you, is for leaving the Park, and deserting us all, before a reconciliation could take place. You knew that my father’s anger was like dew upon the grass, evaporated by the first sunbeam,

and that we loved you dearly—so that your conduct appears inexcusable and heartless.’

“‘Oh, do not say that, Miss Moncton. What I did was perfectly impulsive, without thought or premeditation. I could not imagine that I was in the wrong, and Sir Alexander’s conduct appeared to me cruel and unjust.’

“‘Come with me to the Hall, Mr. Mornington, and I will plead your case to this cruel tyrant. My eloquence, with papa, is quite irresistible—and he, poor dear, is more ready to forgive, than you are to ask forgiveness.’

“This was said, with one of her bewitching smiles, that lighted up like a passing sunbeam her calm, pale face.

“‘You are too good, Miss Moncton. I would gladly avail myself of your invitation, but I must proceed on my journey to York immediately. I hope, however, soon to visit Moncton again; when I will, with Sir Alexander’s permission, explain my conduct, and ask his pardon.’

“‘I hate procrastination in these matters, which pertain to the heart and conscience,’ said Margaret. ‘My motto, when prompted by either, to perform an act of duty, is—*now*; when we seek forgiveness from God, or from a friend, we should never defer it to the future, for the opportunity once neglected, may never again be ours.’

“This was said with some severity. A sort of mental cowardice kept me back and hindered me effectually from profiting by her advice. Just then, I felt it was out of my power to meet Sir Alexander. I had not courage to enter his presence in my present mood.

“‘Alice,’ said Margaret, turning from me with a disappointed air, ‘what has kept *you* so long away from the Hall?’

“‘I grow too proud to visit my rich friends,’ returned Alice, in a tone between sarcasm and raillery.

“‘There is only one species of pride, that I tolerate,’ said Margaret, calmly—‘the pride of worth. That pride which

enables a good man to struggle successfully against the arrogance of the world.'

"I turned to the speaker with admiration. Had she been born a peasant, Margaret Moncton would have possessed the dignity of a lady, and the little lecture she thought fit to bestow upon my beautiful wayward sister, was dictated by the same noble spirit.

" 'We should never be proud, Alice, of the gifts of nature, or fortune, which depend upon no merit of our own. Beauty and wealth have their due influence in the world, where their value is greatly overrated ; but they add little in reality to the possessor. Deprived of both, persons of little moral worth, would relapse into their original insignificance ; while those, who improve the talents entrusted to their care by Providence, possess qualities which defy the power of change. Such persons can alone afford to be proud, yet, these, of all others, make the least display and think most humbly of themselves.'

This was said playfully, but Alice did not at all relish the reproof ; which, though, disregarded by her, made a deep impression upon me.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE MEETING.

"THE next morning I arrived in York, and hastened to the house of Mr. Mornington. I found the dear old gentleman ill in bed, but in his usual excellent spirits.

"On expressing my concern for his illness, he laughed at my long face ; told me it was a trifle, and he should soon be well again. Alas, he was not a true prophet ! In a few weeks I

followed my worthy friend to his grave ; and found myself at the age of one and twenty, my own master, and sole heir to his large property.

“The joy felt at this unexpected good fortune was more than counterbalanced by the loss of the generous donor. Gladly would I have resigned the wealth he so nobly bequeathed me, if by so doing I could have recalled the dear old man to life. I was detained for several months in York, settling my affairs. I lost no time, however, in acquainting Cornelius, by letter, of my good fortune. I took this opportunity of mentioning my attachment to his sister, and urged him, if he valued my happiness, to plead with her in my behalf. His answer, though kind, was far from satisfactory to a young and ardent lover.

“He informed me that Charlotte was not insensible to my passion ; and that he knew that she entertained for me a sincere esteem ; but it was entirely out of her power to accept any offer of marriage without the consent of her guardian ; or she would lose the property bequeathed to her by her father ; who had left this stringent clause in his will.

“For himself, he continued, nothing would give him greater pleasure, than to see his beloved sister united to a man whom he loved, and whom he considered worthy of her regard ; particularly, as he found his own health daily declining, and was about to take a journey to the south of France, in the hope of deriving some benefit from change of climate and scene.

“He urged me to return immediately to London ; to plead my own cause with Charlotte, and to spend a few days with him, before he left England ; as he felt, that it was more than probable, that we might never meet again.

“The last mournful sentence decided me, and the next morning found me on the road to London ; and I determined to take Moncton Park in my route, and seek a reconciliation with Sir Alexander. After what had passed between me and Miss Moncton, I flattered myself that this would be an easy matter.

"I was no longer a poor orphan boy, dependent upon his bounty ; but a well-educated, wealthy man, whose fortune was equal, if not greater than his own. There was no favor I could ask, or that he could bestow, beyond the renewal of that friendship which formed the delight of my boyhood, and of which I had been so suddenly deprived.

"As I rode up the noble avenue of oaks that led to the Hall, I felt so confident of success, so vain of my altered fortunes, so proud of the noble horse I rode, that my spirits grew buoyant, and my cheeks glowed with anticipated pleasure.

"'Is Sir Alexander at home ?' I eagerly demanded of the liveried servant that opened the door.

"'He is, sir. What name shall I send up ?' I gave him my card, and was shown into the library, while he carried it up to his master.

Years had fled away, since I last stood within that room, a happy thoughtless boy. How vividly did every book and picture recall the blessed hours I had passed there, with Margaret and Alice, when the weather was wet, and we could not play abroad. It was in this noble apartment, with its carved oak wainscoting and antique windows of stained glass, in which we generally held our revels, turning over the huge folios in search of pictures.

"There was the Book of Martyrs, with all its revolting details of human bigotry ; and its dreadful exhibitions of human endurance amidst scorn and agony. On these we gazed in mysterious awe ; and as we turned over the horrible pages, we said to one another, 'that we were glad we were not Christians in those days.'

"Then, there was Descartes' ancient philosophy. A huge tome, full of quaint pictures of gods and goddesses, and angels and devils, on which we were never tired of gazing ; infinitely preferring the latter, with their curious tails and horns, to the former ; whom we called, 'Fat lazy-looking children with

wings.' 'Goldsmith's World.' 'Buffon's Natural History,' and the whole family of Encyclopedias, with their numerous prints, were among our chief favorites, and helped to beguile the long wet day.

"Sir Alexander often assisted himself at these exhibitions, and seemed as much pleased with showing us the pictures as we were in looking at them.

"From the cherished memories of former years, I was recalled by the entrance of the servant, who, with an air of rude familiarity, told me—'that Sir Alexander Moncton would never be at home to *Mister Philip Mornington*.'

"Thunder-struck, with this unexpected blow, and writhing under a bitter sense of humiliation, I affected an air of contemptuous indifference and turned to depart; when a light grasp was laid upon my arm, and I encountered the dark soul-lighted eyes of Margaret Moncton, moistened with tears, and fixed upon me with a gaze of mournful interest.

"'Stay, Mr. Mornington. Dear, Philip! stay, I beseech you, for one little moment.'

"'Let me go, Miss Moncton. You deceived me into the belief that my reception would have been very different—I feel that I have no business here.'

"'That was your own fault, in deferring the *now* of to-day, to the *future* of the unknown to-morrow,' said Margaret, sadly. 'But you must stay, I insist upon your hearing me speak a few words before you leave this house.'

"I remained silent and passive, and she continued—'There was a time, Philip, when your sister Margaret would not have asked anything of you in vain.' The tears flowed fast down her pale cheeks, and I felt the small hand that lay upon my arm tremble violently.

"'Dear Miss Moncton,' I said, gently leading her to a seat, and taking one beside her, 'you must make some allowance for mortified pride and wounded feelings. Time has not in the

least diminished the affection and respect I have ever felt for you, and which your present kindness is not at all likely to lessen. I should, however, be deeply concerned, if your condescension should draw down upon you the displeasure of your father.'

" 'Philip, I never do aught which I should be ashamed of my father witnessing. Nothing would give me greater pleasure, than to see him enter this room ; and it is to lead you to him, that brought me here.'

" 'He has once forbidden me his presence,' I cried, rising from my seat—'I shall seek an interview with him no more.'

" 'Let me seek it for you.'

" 'What good would it answer ?'

" 'Can you ask that question, Mr. Mornington ?' Remember all you owe to my father's kindness. I do not want to reproach you with benefits which he felt pleasure in conferring. But surely, some feeling of gratitude is due from one whom he loved for so many years as a son ; whom I am certain he still loves ; whom, if he could once see, would be as dear to him as ever.'

" 'Could I feel that his anger was just, there is no concession however great, Miss Monton, that I would hesitate to make—I love and revere Sir Alexander, but he has taken up idle prejudices against me, and I am too proud—obstinate, if you will—to ask his forgiveness for what I never can look upon as a fault.'

" 'One would think, Philip, that you were a Moncton, so hard and obdurate are their hearts,' said Margaret, weeping afresh. 'How gladly would I be the peacemaker, and reconcile you to each other, but you love strife for its own sake—are too proud to acknowledge an error. Philip,' she cried, passionately, 'do you remember my mother ?'

" 'She had struck a chord that always vibrated intensely in my heart. 'How can I ever forget her ? And yet, Miss

Moncton—dear Miss Moncton—I do not wonder at your asking the question.’

“As I said this tears rushed to my own eyes, as a thousand sad recollections crowded into my mind. The mournful chamber—the bed of death—the calm, sweet face of the expiring saint; and her last solemn injunction, for me to look upon her grave when I came to be a man, and remember her who had loved me as a son. Had I done this? Oh, no. The world had obliterated her pure and holy image from my mind, and all her tenderness and love had been forgotten.

“I stood there before her daughter, whose mind was a perfect transcript of her own, a stricken, self-condemned creature, overcome by emotions which I struggled in vain to repress.

“Margaret perceived the advantage she had gained, and taking my passive hand led me from the room.

“Slowly we paced up the marble staircase into the drawing-room, where we found Sir Alexander reading at a table. He did not raise his head as we entered; and I could not help remarking the great change that a few years had effected in his appearance. His fine chestnut hair was nearly gray, his cheeks had lost the rich vermilion tint which had always given such lustre to his fine dark eyes, and clear olive complexion. He was much thinner, and his lofty figure had taken a decided stoop between the shoulders. The handsome, generous baronet was but the wreck of what he once had been.

“‘Papa,’ said Margaret, stepping forward, and laying her small white hand upon his shoulder, ‘I have taken the liberty of introducing a very old friend.’

“The Baronet raised his eyes. The blood rushed into his pale face, as he replied with great asperity of look and tone, ‘Margaret, you have taken an unfair advantage, and abused the confidence I reposed in you; I did not expect this from you.’

“‘Dearest father, you have suffered my cousin Theophilus to

prejudice you against one whom you once loved—whom my dear mother loved : let him speak for himself.”

“ ‘Well, sir,’ said the Baronet, holding out his hand, ‘what have you to say in extenuation for your past conduct? You found it convenient, no doubt, to forget an old friend.’

“ ‘My excellent, kind benefactor,’ I cried, pressing his hand warmly between my own, ‘how can you imagine me guilty of such base ingratitude?’

“ ‘I judge your feelings, young man, by deeds, not by words. It is not for a boyish act of indiscretion I blame you. You thrashed an insolent lad of your own age for insulting you ; and in your place I would have done the same. To appease his wounded pride, I demanded of you an apology, as the lad was my guest and near kinsman—no very great sacrifice of pride, one would have thought, to a penniless pensioner on my bounty. This, you audaciously refused, and, without waiting for my anger to cool (for I was not acquainted at the time with the real circumstances of the case), you abandoned your home, and sought protection in the house of my enemy—a man who had thwarted me in every way that lay in his power. His favor you gained by traducing your benefactor and friend ; and you now come to me, after the lapse of years, to make a boast of your wealth. Philip Mornington !’ he cried, rising from his seat, and drawing himself up to his full height, ‘I loved you as a spirited, independent boy ; I despise you as a wealthy, treacherous, vain-glorious man !’

“ ‘Dear papa,’ said Margaret, greatly agitated, ‘you can not mean what you say.’

“ ‘I do mean what I say. My words are plain and straightforward ; let him refute them if he can.’

“ ‘To such accusations as you have brought against me, Sir Alexander, there can be but one answer : they are false ! I will not, however, demean myself by attempting to vindicate my conduct from such base calumnies, but leave it to time to convince you of your error, and prove my integrity.’

“Without waiting for his reply, I left the room, with a bearing as haughty and inflexible as his own, and flinging myself into the saddle, rode from the Hall. Disgusted with myself for having yielded to the entreaties of my amiable foster-sister, I could not master my indignation sufficiently to call at the Lodge, but pursued my journey to town with a heavy heart.

“From Cornelius and his sister I received the most cordial and affectionate welcome ; but my pleasure was greatly damped by the bad state of my friend’s health : he looked so thin and consumptive, that I apprehended the worst. This impression gradually wore off ; but a few months confirmed my fears. He was to commence his journey to Dover early the next morning ; and after passing a delightful evening in company with his aunt and Charlotte, I rose to take leave, as I well knew that the dear invalid retired at an early hour to bed.

“‘Do not go to-night, Philip,’ he said. ‘It is the last we shall spend for a long time together. I wish to have a friendly chat with you in my dressing-room. Charlotte will make one of the party.’

“In a few minutes we were comfortably seated in the snug little room, before a cheerful fire. My friend in his easy-chair, wrapped in his dressing-gown, and my own beautiful Charlotte seated on a gaily-embroidered ottoman at his feet.

“‘Here, I feel myself at home,’ said Cornelius, taking a hand of each, and pressing them warmly between his own. ‘How much I dread this journey ; how painful it is to part with all we love on earth.’

“‘Dearest brother, you will return to us quite strong and well after breathing the warm air of the South,’ said Charlotte, who never could be brought to consider her brother in any danger. ‘When we meet in the spring, you will laugh at your present fears, and we shall be so happy together.’

“Cornelius smiled faintly. ‘I hope it may be so, my sweet Charlotte ; to that hope I cling, though I feel it daily becoming more feeble. Nor would I leave England, did I not consider it

my duty to embrace every means which may tend to restore me to health and usefulness. But if I should never return, my little Lady Bird, the world will run on as merrily as heretofore. I should only be missed by a few faithful hearts.'

"Poor Charlotte did not answer. Her head sank upon his knee; and I heard the tears, one by one, fall upon her rich silk dress.

"'Do not anticipate grief, my little sister,' he said, laying his hand caressingly upon her drooping head. 'Let us be happy to-night, for we know not what the morrow may bring forth. I wanted to speak to you and Philip upon a subject very near my heart.'

"After a short pause, he continued with a lively, cheerful voice—

"'You and Philip love one another; nay, do not turn away, Charlotte; there ought to be no shame in confessing a virtuous attachment to a worthy object.'

"Charlotte raised her eyes, moist with tears, and tried to smile; but her head sank back to its resting-place, and her blushing face was hidden on his knee.

"'Now I am perfectly satisfied of the warmth and sincerity of your affections, and will do all in my power to bring them to a happy issue; but there are some difficulties in the way which must be first surmounted, before you can hope to realize your wishes. You have wealth, Philip, and moral worth; these ought to be sufficient to satisfy the objections of the most fastidious. But your birth is obscure, and your connexions not such as most old families would wish to incorporate with their own. You will ask me how I came by this knowledge. It does not matter; for these worldly objections have no weight with me. It was, however, told to me by one well acquainted with your history—who, as guardian to Charlotte, will, I fear, never consent to your marriage.'

"'There are few persons with whom I am sufficiently inti-

mate to obtain this knowledge,' I cried. 'His name—tell me his name.'

" 'Robert Moncton—Sir Alexander's cousin and man of business.'

"I felt a cold shudder thrill through me. The hopes lately so gay and buoyant shrunk back faded and blackened to my heart. 'Yet why should I fear this man?' I argued; but I did fear him—like the ghost of the dead Cæsar in the camp of Brutus—he was my evil genius. I turned very faint and asked for a glass of water.

"Charlotte gave it to me with a trembling hand. The brother and sister exchanged glances of surprise; suspicion was aroused by my emotion.

" 'Strange!' said Charlotte, musingly—'He was always kind to my brother and me. What have you to say against him?'

"Not much—but I have a secret antipathy—a horror of this man, though I never saw him but once, and that when quite a boy. I had a quarrel with his son when a lad, which produced a rupture between Sir Alexander and me, and neither father nor son ever forgave the imagined injury.'

"Charlotte looked thoughtful. It was evident that she was fond of her guardian; while Cornelius continued the conversation, which was to me both painful and embarrassing.

" 'I know Mr. Moncton to be implacable when he takes a dislike, and considers himself ill-used, but we always have regarded him as a just and honest man. The circumstances at which you have hinted, and which I am *rather* surprised, that with all our brotherly intercourse, you never mentioned before, will not increase your chance of success in gaining him over to your wishes. But if I live, Philip, you will have little to fear from his opposition. Charlotte and myself are both above the common prejudices of the world, and prize you for your worth, which we consider more than places you on an equality with us, and my little sister here (and he fondly patted her head) has

too high a sense of honor, to encourage hopes which she never means to realize.'

"I took Charlotte's hand—our eyes met. Her face was again hidden on her brother's knee; but my drooping heart began to revive, and I turned to listen to the long harangue of my good friend with more interest and attention, especially, as Charlotte's small white hand remained firmly clasped in mine, to repay me for its dullness and prolixity.

"'Now, my advice to you both is, not to enter into any engagement, and to keep the matter of your affections known only to yourselves. Confidence reposed in a third party is always hazardous, and generally betrayed. This will lull Moncton's suspicions, for he can greatly annoy you, should you marry Charlotte without his consent, before her minority expires. Her property, which is considerable, would then go to a distant relation.'

"'I have enough to support us both handsomely—why should our union be delayed on that score?' I cried.

"'Softly, my dear friend. Lovers always talk in that strain—husbands think differently. Why should Charlotte lose her just inheritance to gratify the ardor of your passion? You are both young—Charlotte, far too young to marry. Four years is not such a great while to wait. At the expiration of that time you can meet on equal terms, without making such an enormous sacrifice. Am I not right?'

"We said he was, and tried to think so, but I am certain that in the estimation of both his listeners, that that four years which seemed to him so short, with us, spread over a period as long as the life of Methuselah. We tried to look forward, but shrunk back to the present. Everything in prospective looked cold, blank—nay, even ugly and old, at the end of the long vista of four years.

"We promised, however, to abide by his advice. I was sad and low spirited—and Charlotte, pleading a bad head-ache,

kissed her brother, received one from me, or what, in *his* estimation, only passed for *one*, and retired in tears, and I felt that the joy of my heart had vanished.

“ ‘Do not look so grave, Philip,’ said my worthy friend. ‘You will overcome all these difficulties.’

“ ‘I shook my head and sighed doubtfully.

“ ‘I am sure you will. I have a presentiment to that effect. I saw you in a dream last night, surrounded by a thousand dangers. As fast as you got out of some trouble, you fell into a worse, and after I had given you up for lost, you were rescued from the fangs of a tiger by a mere lad, who led you back to Charlotte, and joined your hands.’

“ ‘He told this with such earnestness, that I, who was no believer in signs and omens, laughed outright.

“ ‘He looked serious—almost offended.

“ ‘You forget,’ he said, ‘that when man draws near his end, God often opens the eyes of the soul and reveals, not only what is—but what shall be. Oh, Philip, you who are so eager to win the affections of a timid girl, how can you be so indifferent to the love of God?’

“ ‘Nervous debility has rendered you superstitious, Cornelius. I have no faith in the religious cant of the present day, in priests or priestcraft.’

“ ‘This was my case two years ago. I was young and strong then. In the possession of wealth and all those temporal blessings, for which wiser and better men have to toil through a long life, and seldom obtain. The world was before me, and death far distant, in my thoughts. But now, the world is receding, and death is very near. You start! Have not you discovered that truth before? Soon, very soon, nothing will remain for me, but that blessed hope which I now prize as the only true riches. I am happy in the prospect which I know awaits me, and consider those only miserable to whom God is a stranger, and the love of the Saviour unknown.’

“His words affected me strangely, and yet I felt that they were distasteful. Sorrow had not taught me the knowledge of self. I had yet to learn that religion alone can do that. My soul was grovelling in the dust ; my thoughts wholly engrossed by the world. Religion was to me a well-invented fable, skillfully constructed and admirably told, being beautiful and artistic in a literary point of view, but altogether too shallow to satisfy the reason of a clever fellow like me. Oh, how repugnant are its pure precepts to those whose hearts are blinded by vanity ; who live but for the pleasures of the day, and never heed the to-morrow in the skies.

“I sat down at a table near my friend, and began hastily to turn over the pages of a volume that lay before me. It contained the admirable writings of the Rev. Robert Hall. I pettishly closed the book, and pushed it from me.

“As I raised my head, our eyes met. He evidently read my thoughts.

“‘I do not wish to lecture you, Philip, nor do I condemn you. Your mind, in its present unawakened state, cannot understand the sublime truths you affect to despise. The blind see not ; they cannot comprehend the light, and we are not surprised that they stumble and fall. But I love you too well, Philip, to wish you to remain in this state of mental darkness. Read the Bible with the eyes of faith ; think and pray, and the true light will dawn upon your soul, as it has on mine. Let not the ravings of fanaticism, nor the vulgarity of low cant, frighten you from the enjoyment of the highest and noblest privilege granted to man—the capacity of holding converse with his God. And, now, farewell, my dear friend. I shall see you again in the morning ; think over twice what I have said to you before you go to sleep.’

“I retired to my chamber, but not to rest. I sat before the fire, musing over, and trying to feel an interest in, the advice of my friend ; I knew it was good ; I felt it was right and very

natural, for Cornelius, in his diseased state, to regard it as a subject of vital importance, to cherish it as the last hope that could beguile his mind, and reconcile him to the awful and mysterious change which awaited him. 'Poor Cornelius,' I said, 'dying men catch at straws; will your straw float you safely across the waves of the dark river? I fear not.' And in this mood I went to bed, dreamt of Charlotte, and awoke in the morning to regret the long years which must intervene before she could be mine."

CHAPTER XIX.

Light come, light go.

OLD PROVERB.

"THE next day, my friend bade us adieu. Had he expressed the least wish to that effect, I would have accompanied him to the South—but he did not, and we parted, never to meet again. He died abroad, and Charlotte became the inheritor of his large fortune. Her grief for the loss of her brother affected her health and spirits to such an alarming degree, that instant change of air and scene was recommended by her physician, and she left London to spend some months with her aunt on the Continent. I would have gladly made one in their party, but this she forbade me to do in the most positive terms.

"I fancied that her manner to me had grown cold and distant during the separation that had intervened between her brother's death and the severe illness that followed the announcement of that melancholy event. These fears were confirmed by a long and very prudential letter from her aunt, entreating me, as a mutual friend, not to follow them to Italy, as it might be attended by unpleasant results to Miss Laurie, who was still very young—too young, in her estimation, to acknowledge pub-

lily an accepted lover ; that as no actual engagement existed between us, she thought it most advisable for both parties only to regard each other in the light of friends, until the expiration of the time which would make Miss Laurie the mistress of her hand and fortune. It was impossible to mistake the purport of this letter, which I felt certain must have been sanctioned by her niece. Then, and not until then, was I fully aware of all I had lost by the death of my poor friend.

"Charlotte had repented of her affection for the low-born Philip Mornington. She was a great heiress now, and a match for the first nobleman in the kingdom. I crushed the letter beneath my feet, and felt within my breast the extinction of hope.

"I suspected that Robert Moncton and his son were at the bottom of this unexpected movement ; nor was I mistaken. It was strange, that among the whole range of my acquaintance, I had never been introduced to this rascal and his son, or met him accidentally at any place of public resort. They effectually worked my ruin, but it was in the dark.

"The loss of Charlotte made me reckless of the future. I plunged headlong into all sorts of dissipation : wine, women, the turf, the gaming-table, by turns intoxicated my brain, and engrossed my time and thoughts, until repeated losses to an alarming amount, made me restless and miserable, without in the least checking the growing evil. I had forfeited self respect, and with it the moral courage to resist temptation.

"I was goaded on in my career of guilt by a young man of fascinating person and manners, but of depraved habits and broken fortunes. From the first night that I was introduced to William Howard, he expressed for me the deepest respect and friendship, and haunted me subsequently like my shadow. He flattered my vanity by the most sedulous attentions, echoed my sentiments, hung upon my words, copied my style of dress, and imitated my manners.

“These arts might have failed in producing the desired effect, had he not wound himself into my confidence, by appearing to sympathize in my mental sufferings. He talked of Charlotte, and endeavored to soothe my irritated feelings, by expressing the most sanguine hopes of my ultimate success; and, to dissipate the melancholy that preyed upon my health and spirits, he led me by degrees to mix with the reckless and profligate, and to find pleasure in the society of individuals whom I could not respect, and from whose proximity a few months before I should have shrunk with disgust and aversion.

“A young fellow just beyond his minority is easily led astray, particularly, when he has wealth at his command, and no settled employment or profession to engage his time and thoughts, and, worse still, no religious principles to guide him in his perilous voyage across the treacherous ocean of life.

“Alas, Geoffrey! I chose for my pilot one who had not only ruined himself, but caused the shipwreck of others, superior in prudence and intelligence, to the man who now trusted to his advice and believed him a friend.

“When I look back to that disastrous period of my life, my soul shrinks within itself, and I lament my madness with unceasing bitterness. All that I have since suffered, appears but a just retribution for those three years of vice and folly. Little did I then suspect, that my quondam friend was an infamous sharper, bribed by the still more infamous Robert Moncton to lure me to destruction.

“In spite of her aunt’s prohibition, I had continued to write to Miss Laurie; at first, frequently, seldom many days elapsing between letter and letter, but to my surprise and indignation, not one of my communications had been answered, although breathing the most ardent attachment, and dictated by a passion as sincere as ever animated a human breast. What could be the cause of this cruel neglect? I called repeatedly at Mrs. ——’s house in town, but was constantly told by the old

housekeeper, who received me very coldly, that Miss Laurie and her aunt were still on the continent.

"As long as this miserable state of uncertainty continued, I clung to hope, and maintained the character of a man of honor and a gentleman. But the insidious tempter was ever at hand, to exaggerate my distress, and to weaken my good resolutions. Howard laughed at my constancy to a false mistress, and by degrees, led me to consider myself as a very ill-used man, and Miss Laurie as a heartless coquette.

"Two years had elapsed since the death of Cornelius ; and I was just ready to accompany a party of gay young fellows to Newmarket, when I was told accidentally, that Miss Laurie, the great heiress, had arrived in town, and the young men were laughing and speculating upon the chance of winning her and her fortune.

" 'They say she's a beauty !' cried one.

" 'Beauty won't pay debts,' said another. 'I can't afford to marry for love.'

" 'A plain girl with her property is sure to be handsome. Beauty and gold are too much to fall to the share of one person. I dare say, she's only passable.'

" 'Sour grapes, Hunter,' said Howard. 'You know that you are such a —— ugly fellow, that no woman, with or without a fortune, would take you for better or worse.'

" '*Better* is out of the question, Howard, and he can't be well worse,' said the first speaker. 'But I should like to know if Miss Laurie is really the beauty they say she is. Money is a thing to possess—to enjoy—to get rid of. But beauty is a divinity. I may covet the one—but I adore the other.'

" 'You may do both then, at a humble distance, George. But here's Philip Mornington, can satisfy all your queries—he knows—and used to feel an interest in the young lady.'

"To hear her name in such company, was to me profanation. I made some ungracious reply to what I considered an imper-

tinent observation of Howard's, and feigning some improbable excuse for absenting myself from the party, I turned my horse's head and rode back to my lodgings, in spite of several large bets that I had pending upon a favorite horse.

"Charlotte was in London, and I could not rest until I had learned my fate from her own lips.

"I hastened to her aunt's residence; and, contrary to my expectations, on sending up my card, I was instantly admitted to her presence.

"She was alone in the drawing-room. The slight girl of seventeen was now a beautiful and graceful woman; intelligence beaming from her eyes, and the bloom of health upon her cheek. As I approached the table at which she was seated, she rose to meet me, and the color receded so fast from her face that I feared she would faint, and instead of addressing me with her usual frankness, she turned away her head and burst into tears.

"You may imagine my distress—I endeavored to take her hand, but she drew proudly back.

"Is this Charlotte?"

"Rather let me ask—is this Philip Mornington—my brother's friend?" she spoke with a degree of severity that astonished me—the man for whom I once entertained the deepest respect and affection.'

"Which implies that you do so no longer?"

"You have rightly guessed.'

"And may I ask Miss Laurie why she has seen fit to change the opinion she once entertained?"

"Mr. Mornington,' she said, firmly, repressing the emotion which convulsed her lips and glistened in her eyes, 'I have long wished to see you, to hear from your own lips an explanation of your extraordinary conduct, and though this meeting must be our last, I could not part with you for ever, until I had convinced you that the separation was effected by yourself.'

“ ‘It will be difficult to prove that,’ I said, ‘if you really sanctioned your aunt’s letter, and were privy to its contents.’

“ ‘It was written at my request,’ she replied, with provoking coldness. ‘Mr. Moncton’s suspicions were aroused, and your following us to the continent would have confirmed them, and rendered us both miserable. But my motives for requesting a temporary separation, were fully discussed in my letter which accompanied the one written by my aunt. To this reasonable request you returned no answer, nor, in fact, to several subsequent letters which were written during our absence abroad.’

“ I trembled with agitation while she was speaking, and I fear that she misinterpreted my emotion.

“ ‘Good Heavens !’ I exclaimed at last, ‘how grossly have I deceived myself into the belief that you never wrote to me—that you cast me from you without one word of pity or remorse. I never got a line from you, Charlotte. Your aunt’s cruel letter came only too soon, and was answered too promptly; and to the many I have written to you since, you did not deign a reply.’

“ ‘They never reached us, Mr. Mornington ; and it is strange that these letters (which to me were, at least, matters of no small importance) should be the only ones among the numbers addressed to us by other friends, that miscarried.’

“ I was stung by the incredulous air with which she spoke—it was so unlike my own simple, frank-hearted Charlotte.

“ ‘Miss Laurie, you doubt my word ?’

“ ‘A career of vice and folly, Mr. Mornington, has made me doubt your *character*. While I could place confidence in the *one* I never suspected deceit in the other.’

“ ‘Your silence, Charlotte, drove me to desperation, and involved me in the dissipation to which you allude.’

“ ‘A man of integrity could not so easily be warped from the path of duty:’ she said this proudly. ‘I can no longer love one whom I have ceased to respect, whose conduct, for the last two years, has made me regret that we ever met.’

“ ‘You are too severe, Miss Laurie,’ and I felt the blood rush to my face. ‘You should take into account all I have suffered for your sake.’

“ ‘You found a strange method of alleviating those sufferings, Philip.’ This was said sadly, but with extreme bitterness. ‘Had you loved or cherished me in your memory, you never could have pursued a course of conduct so diametrically opposite to my wishes.’

“ This was a home-thrust. I felt like a guilty and condemned creature, debased in my own eyes, and humbled before the woman I adored.

“ I felt that it was useless to endeavor to defend myself against her just accusations ; yet, I could not part with her, without one struggle more for forgiveness, and while I acknowledged and bitterly lamented my past errors, I pleaded for mercy with the most passionate eloquence. I promised to abjure all my idle companions and vicious habits, and devote the rest of my life entirely to her.

“ She listened to me with tearful earnestness, but remained firm to her purpose, that we were to part there for ever, and only remember each other as strangers.

“ Her obstinacy rendered me desperate. I forgot the provocation I had given her by my wicked and reckless course. I reproached her as the cause of all my crimes. Accused her of fickleness and cruelty, and called Heaven to witness, how little I merited her displeasure.

“ Her gentle feminine brow was overcast ; her countenance grew dark and stern.

“ ‘These are awful charges, Mr. Mornington. Permit me to ask you a few questions, in my turn, and answer them briefly and without evasion.’

“ I gazed in silent astonishment upon her kindling face.

“ ‘Are you in the habit of frequenting the gaming-table?—Yes, or no.’

"My eyes involuntarily shrunk from hers.

" 'The race-course ?'

" 'I must confess to both these charges,' I stammered out.

'But'——

" 'For such conduct there can be no excuse. It is not amid such scenes that I would look for the man I love.'

" 'Cease, Charlotte, in mercy cease, if you do not mean to drive me mad. Some enemy has poisoned your mind against me. Left to yourself, you could not condemn me in this cold, pitiless manner.'

" 'Your own lips have condemned you, Philip.' She stopped, passed her hand across her brow, as if in sudden pain, and sighed deeply.

" 'When will these reproaches end, Charlotte ? Of what else do you accuse me ?'

" 'Is what I have said, false or true ?' she cried, turning suddenly towards me, and grasping my arm. 'If false, clear yourself. If true, what more can I have to do with you ?'

" 'Alas,' I cried, 'it is but too true !'

" 'And can you expect, Mr. Mornington, that any virtuous, well-educated woman could place her happiness in the keeping of one who has shown such little self-government ; who chooses for his associates men of loose morals and bad character. Your constant companion and bosom friend is a notorious gambler, a man whose society is scouted by all honorable men. I pity you, Philip ; weep for you ; pray for you ; and God only knows the agony which this hour has cost me ; but we must meet as lovers and friends no more.'

"She glided from the room, and I stood for some minutes stupidly staring after her, with the horrible consciousness of having exchanged a pearl of great price, for the base coin in which pleasure pays her deluded followers, and only felt the inestimable value of the treasure I had lost, when it was no longer in my power to recover it.

“I returned to the company I had quitted. I betted and lost ; plunged madly on ; staked my whole property on a desperate chance, and returned from the races, forsaken by my gay companions, a heart-broken and ruined man.

“It was night when I reached London. Not wishing to encounter any of my late associates, I entered a coffee-house seldom frequented by men of their class, and called for a bottle of wine.

“The place was ill-lighted and solitary. I threw myself into a far corner of my box, and, for the first time—for I never was a drinker—tried to drown care in the intoxicating bowl.

“The wine, instead of soothing, only increased the fever of my spirit, and I began to review with bitterness the insanity of my conduct for the last few months. With a brain on fire with the wine I continued eagerly to swallow, and a heart as dull and cold as ice from recent mortification and disappointment, I sank with my head upon the table into a sort of waking trance, conscious of surrounding objects, but unable to rouse myself from the stupor which held every faculty in its leaden grasp.

“Two men entered the box. I heard one say to the other, in a voice which seemed familiar.

“‘This place is occupied, we had better go to another.’

“‘The fellow’s drunk,’ returned his companion, ‘and may be considered as *non compos*. He has lost all knowledge of himself, and therefore can take no notice of us.’

“Feeling little interest in anything beyond my own misery, I gave no signs of life or motion, beyond pressing my burning brow more tightly against my folded hands, which rested on the table.

“‘So, Mornington’s career is ended at last, and he is a ruined man,’ said the elder of the twain.

“‘Yes, I have settled his business for you ; and as my success has been great, I expect my reward should be proportionably so.’

“‘I am ready to fulfill my promise, but expect nothing more. You have been well paid by your dupe. He has realized the old proverb—Light come, light go. I thought he would have given you more trouble. Yours, Howard, has been an easy victory.’

“‘Hang the foolish fellow!’ cried my quondam friend ; ‘I feel some qualms of conscience about him—he was so warm-hearted and generous—so unsuspecting, that I feel as if I had been guilty of a moral murder. And what, Mr. Moncton, must be your feelings—your hatred to the poor young man is almost gratuitous, when it appears that you are personally unknown to each other.’

“‘He is the son of my worst enemy, and I will pursue him to death.’

“‘He will spare you the trouble, if I read my man rightly. He will not submit to this sudden change of fortune with stoical indifference, but will finish a career of folly with an act of madness.’

“‘Commit suicide !’

“‘Ay, put a pistol to his head. He is an infidel, and will not be scared from his purpose by any fear of an hereafter.’

“‘Bring me that piece of news to-morrow, Howard, and it will be something to stake at hazard before night.’

“He left the box ; I rose to prevent him, but the opportunity of revenge was lost. The younger scoundrel remained behind to settle with the waiter ; as he turned round I confronted and stared him full in the face. He pretended not to know who I was.

“‘Fellow, let me pass !’

“‘Never ! until you have received the just reward of your treachery. You are a mean, contemptible wretch—the base hireling of a baser villain. I will prosecute you both for entering into a conspiracy against me.’

“‘You had better let it alone,’ he said, in a hoarse whisper.

'You are a disappointed and desperate man. No sensible person will listen to complaints made by a drunken, broken-down spendthrift and gambler.'

"'Liar !' I cried, losing all self-control, 'when did you ever see me drunk, or knew me guilty of one dishonorable act ?'

"'You were always too great a fool, Mornington, to take care of yourself, and you are not able, at this moment, to stand steady. Be that, however, as it may, I never retract my words—if you require satisfaction, you know where to find me.'

"'I will neither meet nor treat you as a gentleman. You are beneath contempt.'

"'The son of a drunken huntsman has a greater claim to gentility,' sneered the sharper, bursting into an insulting laugh. 'Your mother may, perhaps, have given you an indirect claim to a higher descent.'

"This taunt stung me to madness, and sobered me in a moment. I flung myself headlong upon him. I was young and strong—the attack unexpected, he fell heavily to the ground. In my fury I spat upon him, and trampled him beneath my feet. Death, I felt was too honorable a punishment for such a contemptible villain. I would not have killed him though certain that no punishment would follow the act.

"The people of the house interfered. I was taken into custody and kept in durance vile until the following morning ; but as no one appeared to make any charge against me, I was released, with a severe reprimand from the police magistrate, and suffered to return home.

"Home—I had now no home—about one hundred pounds was all that remained to me of my fine property when my debts, falsely termed debts of honor, were paid, my lodgings settled for, and my servant discharged.

"My disgrace had not yet reached the home of my childhood. A state of mental suffering brought on a low fever. I was

seized with an indescribable longing, an aching of the heart to end my days in my native village.

“Pride in vain combated with this feeling. It resisted all the arguments of reason and common sense. Nature triumphed—and a few days saw me once more under the shadow of the great oak that canopied our lowly dwelling.



CHAPTER XX.

ALICE.

“As I approached the cottage door, my attention was arrested by a low, mournful voice, singing in sad and subdued tones, a ditty which seemed the spontaneous outpouring of a wounded spirit. The words were several times repeated, and I noted them down as I leant upon the trunk of the old tree. Out of sight, but within a few feet of the songstress, whose face was hidden from me by the thick foliage of the glorious old tree, in whose broad-spreading branches, I had played and frolicked when a boy.

THE SONG.

“I once was happy, blithe and gay,
No maiden's heart was half so light;
I cannot sing, for well a-day!
My morn of bliss is quenched in night.

I cannot weep—my brain is dry,
Deep woe usurps the voice of mirth
The sunshine of youth's cloudless sky
Has faded from this goodly earth.

My soul is wrapped in midnight gloom,
And all that charmed my heart before,
Droops earthward to the silent tomb,
Where darkness dwells for evermore.’

"The voice ceased.

"I stepped from my hiding-place. Alice rose from the bench beside the door; the work on which she was employed fell from her hand, and she stood before me wild and wan—the faded spectre of past happiness and beauty.

"'Good Heavens, Alice! Can this be you?'

"'I may return the compliment,' she said, with a ghastly smile. 'Can this be Philip? Misery has not been partial, or your brow wears its mark in vain.'

"'Unhappy sister of an unhappy brother,' I cried, folding her passive form to my heart, 'I need not ask why you are altered thus.'

"The fire that had been burning in my brain for some weeks yielded to softer emotions. My head sunk upon her shoulder, and I wept long and bitterly.

"Alice regarded me with a curious and mournful glance, but shed no tears.

"'Alice! That villain has deceived you?'

"She shook her head.

"'It is useless to deny facts so apparent. Do you love him still?'

"She sighed deeply. 'Yes, Philip. But he has ceased to love me.'

"'Deserted you?'

"Her lip quivered. She was silent.

"'The villain! his life shall answer for the wrong he has done you!'

"The blood rushed to her pale, wasted cheeks, her eyes flashed upon me with unnatural brilliancy, and grasping my arm, she fiercely and vehemently replied.

"'Utter that threat but once again, and we become enemies for life. If he has injured me and made me the wreck you see—it is not in the way you think. To destroy him would drive me to despair. It would force me to commit an act of desperation—I will suffer no one to interfere between me and the man

I love. I am strong enough to take my own part—to avenge myself, if need be. I can bear my own grief in silence, and therefore beg that you will spare your sympathy for those who weep and pule over misfortune. I would rather be reproached than pitied for sorrows that I draw upon myself.'

"She sat down trembling with excitement, and tried to resume her former occupation. Presently the needle dropped from her hand, and she looked wistfully up into my face.

"Philip, what brought you here?"

"An unwelcome visitor, I fear.'

"Perhaps so. People always come at the worst times, and when they are least wanted.'

"Do you include your brother in that sweeping commonplace term—has he become to you as one of the people? Ah, Alice.'

"We have been no more to each other for the last three years, Philip. Your absence and long silence made me forget that I had a brother. Few could suppose it, from the little interest you ever expressed for me.'

"I did not think of you, or love you the less.'

"Mere words. Love cannot brook long separation from the object beloved. It withers beneath neglect, and without personal intercourse droops and dies. While you were happy and prosperous you never came near us; and I repeat again,—what brings you now?"

"I have been unfortunate, Alice; the dupe of villains who have robbed me of my property, while my own folly has deprived me of self-respect and peace of mind. Ill and heart-sick, I could not resist the strong desire to return to my native place to die.'

"There is no peace here, Philip,' she said, in a low soft voice. 'I too, would fain lie down on the lap of mother earth and forget my misery. But we are too young—too wretched to die. Death comes to the good and happy, and cuts down the strong

man like the flower of the field—but flies the wretch who courts it, and grins in ghastly mockery on the couch of woe. Take my advice, Philip Mornington, lose no time in leaving this place. Here, danger besets you on every side.’

“ ‘Why, Alice, do you think I fear the puny arm of Theophilus Moncton. The base betrayer of innocence.’

“ ‘Why Theophilus. Spare your reproaches, Philip ; we shall quarrel seriously if you mention that name with disrespect to me—I cannot, and will not bear it. It was not him I meant. You have offended our grandmother by your long absence. Dinah loves you not. It is her anger I would warn you to shun.’

“ ‘And do you think, I am such a coward, as to tremble and fly from the malice of a peevish old granny ?’

“ ‘You laugh at my warning, Philip. You may repent your rashness when too late. The fang of the serpent is not deadened by age, and the rancor in the human heart seldom diminishes with years. Dinah never loved you, and absence has not increased the strength of her affection.’

“ ‘I am not come to solicit charity, Alice.’ I have still enough to pay the old woman handsomely for board and lodging until my health returns, or death terminates my sufferings. If Dinah takes me—a fact I do not doubt—she loves money. ‘Where is she now ?’

“ ‘In the village, I expect her in every minute.’

“ ‘And Miss Moncton ?’ I said, hesitating, and lowering my voice. ‘How is she ?’

“ ‘I don’t know,’ returned Alice, carelessly, ‘the Hall is no longer open to me.’

“ ‘That tells its own tale,’ said I sorrowfully.

“ ‘The tale may be false, in spite of probability,’ returned she, fiercely. ‘No one should dare openly to condemn another without sufficient evidence.’

“ ‘They need not go far for that.’

“‘That is your opinion.’

“‘On most conclusive evidence.

“‘How charitable.’

“‘How true, Alice.’

“‘False as the world. As you, as every one is to the unfortunate,’ she cried, with indignation in her eyes and scorn upon her lip. ‘But here is Dinah—Dinah, whom you consider unfeeling and cruel. She knows me, and loves me better than you do. She does not join with a parcel of conventional sneaks to condemn me.’

“As she ceased speaking, Dinah entered with a basket on her arm. After the first surprise at my unexpected and unwelcome appearance was over, she accosted me with more amenity of look and manner than I ever before knew her to assume.

“‘How are you, Philip? you look ill. Suppose you have got into some trouble, or we should not be honored by a visit?’

“‘You are right, in part, grandmother. I have been sick for some days, and have come home for change of air and good nursing.’

“I put a handful of gold into her lap. ‘You see I am willing and able to pay for the trouble I give. When this is gone, you can have more.’

“‘Money is always welcome—more welcome often than those that bring it. All things considered, however, I am glad to see you. When relatives are too long separated, they become strangers to each other. Alice and I had concluded that you only regarded us as such. The sight of you will renew the old tie of kindred, and make you one of us again. Quick, Alice, get your brother some supper; he must be hungry after his long journey.’

“‘I am in no need; Alice, do not trouble yourself; I feel too ill to eat. I will go to bed if you please. All I want at present is *rest*.’

“Dinah, who was passing the gold from one hand to the

other, and gazing upon it with infinite satisfaction, suddenly looked up and repeated the last word after me, with peculiar emphasis.

“‘*Rest!* Who rests in this world? Even sleep is not rest; the body sleeps, but the soul toils on, on, on, for ever. There is no such thing as rest. If I thought so, I would put an end to my existence to-morrow—I would; and meet death as a liberator from the vexatious turmoils of life.’

“There was something in these words that filled my mind with an indescribable horror—a perfect dread of endless duration. I had always looked upon the grave as a place of rest—a haven of peace from the cares of life; that old raven, with her dismal croaking, had banished the pleasing illusion, and made me nervously sensitive to the terrors of a living, conscious eternity. Whilst undressing to go to bed, I was seized with violent shivering fits, and before morning was delirious, and in a high fever.

“I had never suffered from severe illness before; I had often been afflicted in mind, but not in body. I now had to endure the horrors of both combined. For the first fortnight I was too ill to think. I was in the condition of the unfortunate patriarch, who in the morning exclaimed, ‘Would God it were night!’ and when night came, reversed the feverish hope.

“There were moments, however, during the burning hours of these sleepless nights, when the crimes of the past, and the uncertainty of the future, rushed before me in terrible distinctness; when I tried to pray and could not, and sought comfort from the Word of God, and found every line a condemnation. Oh, these dreadful days and nights, when I lay a hopeless, self-condemned expectant of misery, shuddering on the awful brink of eternity, shrieking to the Almighty Father for peace, and finding none; seeking for rest with strong cries and tears, and being repaid with ten-fold agony. May I never again suffer in flesh and spirit what I then endured!

"The poor lost girl who watched my bed, beheld the fierce tossings of pain, the agonies of remorse, with icy apathy. She could neither direct nor assist my mind in its struggles to obtain one faint glimmer of light through the dense gloom caused by infidelity and sin.

"Death—natural death—the mere extinction of animal life, I did not dread. Had the conflict ended with annihilation, I could have welcomed it with joy. But death unaccompanied by total extinction was horrible. To be deprived of moral life—to find the soul for ever separated from God, all its high and noble faculties destroyed, while all that was infamous and debasing remained to form a hell of memory, an eternity of despair, was a conviction so dreadful, so appalling to my mind, that my reason for a time bowed before it, and for some days I was conscious of nothing else.

"This fiery trial yielded at last. I became more tractable, and could think more calmly upon the awful subject ever uppermost in my mind. I felt a strong desire to pray, to acknowledge my guilt to Almighty God, and sue for pardon, and restoration to peace and happiness. I could not express my repentance in words, I could only sigh and weep, but He who looks upon the naked human heart, knew that my contrition was sincere, and accepted the unformed petition.

"As the hart panteth for the water brooks, so did my thirsty soul pant for the refreshing waters of life. In feeble tones I implored Alice to read to me from the New Testament. My eyes were so much affected by the fever, that I could scarcely distinguish the objects round me.

"The request was distasteful, and she evaded it for many days—at last, replied testily,

"'There is not such a book in the house—never was—and you know that quite well.'—

"'You can borrow one of the schoolmaster in the village.'

"'I will do no such thing. A pretty story truly, to go the

rounds of Moncton. That the Morningtons were such godless people they had no Bible in the house, and had to borrow one. They say that Dinah is a witch, and this would confirm it.'

" 'Send the boy that cuts sticks in the wood. Let him ask it as if for his mother. I know Mr. Ludd will lend it for a good purpose ; and tell the boy I will give him half a sovereign for his pains.'

" 'Nonsense. Why that would buy the book.'

" 'Oh, do buy it, Alice, my good angel ; for the love of God, send and buy it. You will find my purse in my coat-pocket. It will be the best money that was ever laid out by me.'

" 'You had better be still and go to sleep, Philip ; you are far too ill to bear the fatigue of reading yet.'

" 'This was dreadfully tantalizing, but I was forced to submit. The next morning she brought me a cup of tea. I looked wistfully in her face.

" 'Dear Alice, you could give me something that would do me more good than this.'

" 'Some broth, perhaps ; sick people always fancy everything that is not at hand.'

" 'That book.'

" 'Are you thinking about that still ?'

" 'I long for the bread of life.'

" 'Do you want to turn Methodist ?'

" 'I wish to become a Christian.'

" 'Are you not one already ?'

" 'Oh, no, no, Alice! All my life long I have denied the word of God and the power of salvation ; and now, I would give the whole world, if I possessed it, to obtain the true riches. Do, dear sister, grant my earnest request, and may the God of all mercy bring you to a knowledge of the truth.'

" 'I hate cant,' said Alice, discontentedly, 'but I will see what I can do for you.'

" 'She took some money from my purse and left the room.

"Hours passed away. I listened for her returning footsteps until I fell asleep. It was night when I again unclosed my eyes. Alice was sitting by the little table reading. Oh, blessed sight. The Bible lay open before her.

" 'I dreamt it,' I cried joyfully. 'I dreamt that you got it, and God has brought it to pass. Oh, dear Alice you have made me so happy.'

" 'What shall I read?'

"I was puzzled; so much a stranger was I to the sacred volume, that though it had formed a portion of my school and college studies, the little interest then felt in its contents, had made me almost a stranger to them.

" 'Read the Gospel of St. John.'

" 'A chapter you mean.'

" 'As much as you can. Until you are tired.'

"She began at the opening chapter of that sublime gospel, in which we have so much of the mind of Jesus, though less of his wondrous parables and miracles; but matter that is higher, more mysterious, spiritual and satisfying to the soul. Nor could I suffer her to lay aside the book until it was concluded.

"How eagerly I drank in every word, and long after every eye was closed in sleep I continued in meditation and prayer. A thousand times I repeated to myself, 'And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free.' What a glorious emancipation from the chains of sin and death. Oh, how I longed for a knowledge of that truth, and the answer came. 'O Lord thy word is truth;' and the problem in my soul was satisfied, and with a solemn thanksgiving I devoted myself to the service of God. A calm and holy peace came down upon my soul, and that night I enjoyed the first refreshing sleep I had known for many weeks.

"In the morning I was much better, but still too weak to leave my bed.

"I spent most of the day in reading the Bible. Alice had relaxed much of her attention, and I only saw her during the brief periods when she administered medicine, or brought me broth or gruel.

"I felt hurt at her coldness ; but it was something more than mere coldness. Her manner had become sullen and disagreeable. She answered me abruptly and in monosyllables, and appeared rather sorry than glad, that I was in a fair way of recovering.

"I often heard her and Dinah hold confused whispering conversations, in the outer room into which mine opened, the cottage being entirely on the ground floor, and one evening I thought I recognized the deep tones of a man's voice. I tried to catch a part of their discourse, but the sounds were too low and guarded to make anything out. A short time after I heard the sound of horses' hoofs upon the gravel walk that led past the cottage into the park. I sat up in the bed which was opposite the window, which commanded a view of the road, and perceived, to my dismay, that the stranger was no other than Robert Moncton, who was riding towards the village.

"A dread of something—I scarcely knew what—took possession of my mind, and remembering my weak, helpless state, and how completely I was in the power of Dinah North, I gave myself up to vague apprehensions of approaching evil.

"Ashamed of my weakness, I took the sacred volume from under my pillow, and soon regained my self-possession. I felt that I was in the hands of God, and that all things regarding me would be ordered for the right. Oh, what a blessing is this trust in the care of an overruling Providence ; how it relieves one from brooding over the torturing fears of what may accrue on the morrow, verifying the divine proverb : 'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.'

"A thick, dark, rainy night had closed in, when my chamber

door opened, and Alice glided in. She held in her hand a small tray, on which was a large tumbler of mulled wine and some dry toast. I had not tasted food since noon, and I felt both faint and hungry. A strange, ghastly expression flitted over my sister's face, which was unusually pale, as she sat down on the side of the bed.

“‘You have been a long time away,’ said I, with the peevish fretfulness of an invalid. ‘If you were ill and incapable of helping yourself, Alice, I would not neglect you, and leave you for hours in this way. I might have died during your absence.’

“‘No fear of that, Philip. You are growing cross, which is always a good sign. I would have come sooner, but had so many things to attend to, that it was impossible. Dinah is too old to work, and all the household work falls on me. But, how are you?’

“‘Better, but very hungry.’

“‘I don’t doubt it. It is time you took something. I have got a little treat for you—some fine mulled sherry—it will do you good and strengthen you.’

“‘I don’t care for it,’ said I, with an air of disgust. ‘I am very thirsty. Give me a cup of tea.’

“‘We got tea hours ago, when you were asleep, and there is not a drop of hot water in the kettle. The wine is more nourishing. The doctor recommended it. Do taste it, and see how good it is!’

“I tried to comply with her request. A shudder came over me as I put the tumbler to my lips. ‘It’s of no use,’ I said, putting it back on to the tray. ‘I cannot drink it.’

“‘If you love me, Philip, try. Drink a little, if you can. I made it on purpose to please you.’

“She bent her large bright eyes on me with an anxious, dubious expression—a strange, wild look, such as I never saw her face wear before.

“I looked at her in return, with a curious, searching gaze.

I did not exactly suspect her of any evil intention towards me, but her manner was mysterious, and excited surprise.

"She changed color, and turned away.

"A sudden thought darted through my brain. Robert Moncton had been there. He coveted my death, for what reason I could not fathom. I only knew the fact. What if that draught were poison!—and suspicion, once aroused, whispered it is poison.

"I rose slowly in the bed, and grasped her firmly by the wrist.

"'Alice! we will drink of that glass together. You look faint and pale. The contents will set you all right. Take half and I will drink the rest.'

"'I never drink wine.'

"'You dare not drink that wine.'

"'If I liked it, what should hinder me?'

"'You could not like it Alice. It is *poison*!'

A faint cry burst from her lips.

"'God of heaven, who told you that?'

"'Flesh and blood did not reveal it to me. Alice, Alice, how could I imagine such a thing of you?'

"'How, indeed!' murmured the wretched girl, weeping passionately. '*She* persuaded me to bring it to you. *He* mixed the wine. I—I had nothing else to do with it.'

"'Yet to you, as a willing instrument of evil, they entrusted the most important part of their hellish mission.'

"She flung herself on her knees beside the bed, and raising her clasped hands and streaming eyes to Heaven implored God to forgive her for the crime she had premeditated against my life, binding herself in an awful curse, not only to devise means to save my life, but to remove me from the cottage.

"'As to you, Philip, I dare not ask you to forgive me—I only implore you not to curse me.'

"'I should entertain a very poor opinion of myself, if I should

refuse to do the one, or attempt such an act of wickedness as is involved in the other. But, Alice, do not think that I can excuse the commission of such a dreadful crime as murder—and upon whom? A brother who loved you tenderly—who, to his own knowledge, never injured you in word, thought or deed.'

" 'Philip, you are not my brother, or the deed had never been attempted.'

" 'Not your brother! Who am I then?'

" 'I cannot—dare not tell you. At least not now. Escape from this dreadful place, and some future time may reveal it.'

" 'You talk of escape as a thing practicable and easy. I am so weak I can scarcely stand, much less walk ten paces from the house. How can I get away unknown to Dinah?'

" 'Listen to me—I will tell you.' She rose from her knees, and gliding to the door that led into the outer room, she gently unclosed it, and leaning forward looked cautiously into the outer space. Satisfied that it was vacant, she returned stealthily to my bedside.

" 'I must make Dinah believe that you have drank this wine. In less than two hours you will, in her estimation, be dead. Not a creature knows of your return. For our own sakes, we have kept your being here a profound secret. Robert Moncton, however, was duly informed by Dinah of your visit. He came this morning to the house, and they concocted this scheme between them. She is now absent looking for a convenient spot for a grave for your body when dead. She talked of the dark shrubbery. That spot is seldom visited by any one, because the neighbors fancy that it is haunted. You know how afraid we were of going near those dark, shadowy yews when we were children. Margaret used to call it the valley of the shadow of death.'

" 'And it was there,' I said, with a shudder, 'that you meant to bury me?'

“ ‘There—I have promised to drag your body to the spot in a sack, and help Dinah make the grave. But hist—I thought I heard a step. We have no time to waste in idle words.’

“ ‘She cannot bury me, you know, without my consent, before I am dead,’ I said, with a faint smile. ‘Nor can I imagine how you will be able to deceive her. She will certainly discover the difference between an empty sack and a full one.’

“ ‘I have hit on a plan, which, if well managed, will lull her suspicions to sleep. You know the broken statue of Apollo, that lies at the entrance of the Lodge? It is about your size. It once belonged to the Hall gardens, and Sir Alexander gave it to me for a plaything years ago. I did not care for such a huge doll, and it has lain there ever since. I will convey this to your chamber, and dress it in your night-clothes. The sack will cover the mutilated limbs, and by the dim, uncertain light of the dark lantern, she will never discover the cheat.’

“ ‘But if she should insist on inspecting the body?’

“ ‘I will prevent it. In the meanwhile you must be prepared to leave the house when I come to fetch the body.’

“ ‘I felt very sick, and buried my face in the pillows.

“ ‘I do not care to go ; let me stay here and die.’

“ ‘You must live for my sake,’ cried the unhappy girl, clasping my cold hand to her heart, and covering it with kisses. ‘If you fail me now, we are both lost. Dinah would never forgive me for betraying her and Moncton. Do you doubt that what I have told you is true?’

“ ‘Not in the least, my poor Alice ; but I am so weak and ill—so forsaken and unhappy, that I no longer care for the life you offer.’

“ ‘It was the gift of God. You must not throw it away. He may have work on the earth that he requires you to do.’

“ ‘These words saved me. I no longer hesitated to take the chance she offered me, though I entertained small hopes of its success. Yet if the hand of Providence was stretched out to

rescue me from destruction, it was only right for me to yield to its guidance with obedient gratitude and praise.

"Alice was about to leave the room—she once more returned to my side.

" 'Say that you forgive me, Philip.'

"I folded her in my thin, wasted arms, and imprinted a kiss on her rigid brow.

" 'From my very heart !'

" 'God bless you, Philip ! I will love and cherish your memory to my dying hour.'

"The house door opened suddenly ; she tore herself from my embrace. 'Dinah is coming—lie quite still—moan often, as if in pain, and leave me to manage the rest.'

"She left the chamber, and the door purposely ajar, that I might be guided in my conduct by what passed between them.

" 'Did he drink it ?' whispered the dreadful woman.

" 'He did.'

" 'And how does it agree with his stomach ?' she laughed—her low, horrid laugh.

" 'As might be expected—he feels *rather* qualmish.'

" 'Ha, ha !' cried the old fiend, rubbing her withered long hands together, 'you came Delilah over him. Our pretty Samson is caught at last. Let me see—how long will it be before the poison takes effect—about two hours—when did he take it ?'

" 'About an hour ago. He is almost insensible. Don't you hear him groan. The struggle will soon be over.'

" 'And then my bonny bird will have no rival to wealth and power. What your mother, by her obstinate folly, lost, your wit and prudence, my beauty, will regain.'

"This speech of Dinah's was to me perfectly inexplicable. I heard Alice sigh deeply, but she did not reply.

"The old woman left the cottage but quickly returned.

" 'I want the spade.'

“ ‘You will find it in the out-house ; the mattock is there, too ; you will need it to break the hard ground.’

“ ‘No, no ; my arm is strong yet—stronger than you think, for a woman of my years. The heavy rain has moistened the earth. The spade will do the job ; we need not make a deep grave. No one will ever look for him there.’

“ ‘The place was always haunted, it will be doubly so now.’

“ ‘Pshaw ! who believes in ghosts. The dead are dead—lost—gone for ever ; grass springs from them, and their juices go to fatten worms and nourish the weeds of the earth. Light me the lantern and I will defy all the ghosts and demons in the world ; and hark you, Alice, the moment he is dead put the body in a sack, and call me to help to drag it to the grave. I shall have it ready in no time.’

“ ‘ ‘Monster !’ I muttered to myself, ‘the pit you are preparing for me, ere long, may open beneath your own feet.’

“ ‘I heard the old woman close the front door after her, and presently Alice reëntered my chamber.

“ ‘ ‘Well, thank God she is gone on her unholy task. Now, Philip ! now—lose no time—rise, dress yourself, and be off as fast as you can !’

“ ‘I endeavored to obey, but, exhausted by long sickness, I fell back fainting upon the bed.

“ ‘ ‘Stay,’ said Alice, ‘you are weak for the want of nourishment. I will get you food and drink.’

“ ‘She brought me a glass of port wine, and some sandwiches. I drank the wine eagerly, but could not touch the food. The wine gave me a fictitious strength. After making several efforts I was able to rise and dress—the excitement of the moment and the hope of escape acting as powerful stimulants. I secured all that remained of my small fund of money, tied up a change of linen in a pocket-handkerchief, kissed the pale girl

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who stood cold and tearless at my side, and committing myself to the care of God, stole out into the dark night.

"I breathed again the fresh air, and my former vigor of mind returned. I felt like one just freed from prison, after having had sentence of death pronounced against him. I was once more free—miraculously escaped from death and danger, and silently and fervently I offered up a grateful prayer to the Heavenly Father, to whom I was indebted for such a signal act of mercy.

"You will think it strange, Geoffrey—the whim of a madman—but I felt an unsatiable curiosity to witness the interment of my supposed body, to see how Alice would carry out the last act of the tragic drama.

"The wish was no sooner formed, than I prepared to carry it into execution.

"The yew shrubbery lay at the north end of the cottage, and was divided from the road, by a clipped holly hedge. A large yew tree grew out of the centre of this hedge, which had been clipped to represent a watch tower. Open spaces having been left for loop-holes. Through these square green apertures, I had often, when a boy, made war upon the blackbirds and sparrows, unseen by my tiny game.

"By creeping close to the hedge, and looking through one of these loop-holes, I could observe all that was passing within the shrubbery, without being observed by Dinah or Alice. Cautiously stealing along, for the night was intensely dark, and guiding my steps by the thick hedge, which resembled a massy green wall, I reached the angle where it turned off into the park. In this corner stood the green tower I was seeking, and climbing softly the gate which led into the spacious domain of the Monctons, I stepped upon a stone block used by the domestics for mounting horses, and thus raised several feet from the ground, I could distinctly observe, through the opening in the tree, all that was passing below.

"A faint light directly beneath me, gleamed up in the dense drizzly darkness, and shone on the hideous features of that abhorred old woman, who was leaning over a shallow grave she had just scooped out of the wet dank soil. Her arms rested on the top of the spade, and she scowled down into the pit that yawned at her feet, with a smile of derision on her thin sarcastic lips.

"It's deep enough to hide him from the light of day. There's neither a shroud nor coffin to take up the room, and he is worn to a skeleton by his long sickness. Yes—there let him rest till the judgment day—the worm for his mate and the cold clay for his pillow ; I wish the same bed held all his accursed race.

"And his pale-faced, dainty mother—where is she ? Does her spirit hover near, to welcome her darling to the land of dreams ?

"A light step sounded on the narrow path that led from the shrubbery to the cottage, accompanied by a dull lumbering sound.

"Dinah, raised the lantern from the side of the grave, and held it up into the dark night.

"Alice ?

"Dinah !

"Is he dead ?

"Yes. Here, lend a hand. The body is dreadfully heavy. I am almost killed with dragging it hither.'

"You did not bring it alone !

"Who could I ask to help me ? and I was so afraid of discovery, I dared not leave it to come for you.'

"The old woman put down the light, and went to help her granddaughter.

"Let us roll the body into the grave, mother.'

"Not yet—I must look at him.'

"He makes a dreadful corpse.'

"Death is no flatterer, child. Hold up the light.'

“ ‘No, no !—You must not—you shall not triumph over him now. Let the dead rest, I dare not look upon that blue cold face, those staring eyes again.’

“ ‘Who wants you, foolish child ? I wish to satisfy myself that my enemy is dead.’

“ A scuffle ensued, in which the light was extinguished, and the supposed body rolled heavily over into the grave.

“ ‘Oh, mother, mother ! the light is out, and we’re alone with the corpse in this dreadful darkness.’

“ ‘Nonsense—how timid you are. Go back to the house and re-light the candle.’

“ ‘I dare not go alone.’

“ ‘Then let me go ?’

“ ‘And leave me with him ? Oh, not for worlds. Mother mother ! I hear him moving in the grave. He is going to rise and drag me down into it. Look—look ! I see his eyes glaring in the dark hole. There, mother—there !’

“ ‘Curse you for a weak fool ! You make even my flesh creep.’

“ ‘Cover it up—cover it up !’ cried Alice, pushing with her hands and feet some of the loose earth into the grave. ‘That ghastly face will rise and condemn us at the Last Day. It will haunt me as long as I live. Oh, ’tis terrible, terrible, to feel the stain of blood on your soul, and to know that all the waters of the great ocean could never wash it out.’

“ ‘I will go home with you, Alice, and return and close the grave myself,’ said Dinah, in a determined tone. ‘If you stay here much longer, you will make me as great a coward as yourself.’

“ I heard the sound of their retreating steps, and leaving my place of concealment, slowly pursued my way to the next village. Entering a small tavern, I asked for supper and a bed. The innkeeper and his wife were both known to me, but I was so

much altered by sickness that they did not recognize me. After taking a cup of tea, I retired to rest, and was so overcome by mental and bodily fatigue, that I slept soundly until noon the next day, when I breakfasted, and took a seat in the mail coach for London.

"During my journey I calmly pondered over my situation, and formed a plan for the future, which I lost no time in putting into practice.

"From what had fallen from the lips of Alice, I was convinced that some mystery was connected with my birth, and the only means which I could devise to fathom it, was to gain more insight into the character and private history of Robert Moncton.

"At times the thought would present itself to my mind that this man might be my father. My mother was a strange creature—a woman whose moral principles could not have ranked very high. I scarcely knew, from my own experience, if she possessed any—at all events I determined to get a place in his office, if possible, and wait patiently until something should turn up which might satisfy my doubts, and expose the tissue of villainy that an untoward destiny had woven around me. While at college, I had studied for the bar, and had gained an extensive knowledge in the jurisprudence of my country—in which I took great delight, and which I had intended to follow as a profession; when, unfortunately, the death of Mr. Mornington rendered me an independent man. At school I had learned to write all sorts of hands, and could engross with great beauty and accuracy.

"As a man, I was personally unknown to Robert Moncton, whom I never beheld but once, and for a few minutes only, when a boy, and time and sickness had so altered me, that it was not very likely that he would recognize me again.

"Two years previous to the time of which I am now speak-

ing, I had saved the eldest son of Mr. Moncton's head clerk from drowning, at the risk of my own life. Mr. Bassett was overwhelming in his expressions of gratitude, and as to his poor little wife, she never mentioned the circumstance with dry eyes.

"The boy, who was about ten years of age, was a very noble, handsome little fellow, and I often walked to their humble lodgings to see him and his good parents, who always received me with the most lively demonstrations of joy.

"To these good people I determined to apply for advice and assistance. Fortunately my application was made in a lucky moment. Mr. Bassett was about to leave your uncle's office, and he strongly recommended me to his old master, as a person well known to him; of excellent character, and who was every way competent to fill his place.

"I was accepted. You know the rest.

"Our friendship, dear Geoffrey, rendered my situation far from irksome, while it enable me to earn a respectable living. At present, I have learned little, that can throw any additional light upon my sad history. Alice Mornington still lives, and is about to become a mother. Theophilus, the dastardly author of her wrongs, is playing the lover to the beautiful Catherine Lee, who is a ward of his father's.

"From the conversation that passed between Dinah North and Mr. Moncton in your chamber, I suspect that my poor Alice is less guilty than she appears. Dinah has some deeper motive than merely obliging Robert Moncton, in wishing to make you a bastard. I feel confident that this story has been recently got up, and is an infamous falsehood. If true, you would have heard of it before, and I advise you to leave no stone unturned to frustrate their wicked conspiracy."

"But what can I do? I have neither money nor friends; and my uncle will take precious good care that no one in this city shall give me employment."

“Go to Sir Alexander. He expressed an interest in your situation. Tell him the story of your wrongs, and, depend upon it, he will not turn a deaf ear to your complaint. I know that he hates both father and son, and will befriend you to oppose and thwart them.”

My heart instantly caught at this proposal.

“I will go !” I cried. “But I want the means.”

“I can supply you with the necessary funds,” said George Harrison, for I must still call him by his old name. “And my offer is not wholly disinterested. Perhaps, Geoff, you may be the means of reconciling your friend to his old benefactor. But this must be done cautiously. Dinah North must not know that I am alive. Her ignorance of this fact, places this wicked woman in our power, and may hereafter force her to reveal what we want to know.”

I promised implicit obedience to these injunctions, and thanked him warmly for his confidence and advice. His story had made a deep impression on my mind. I longed to serve him. Indeed, I loved him with the most sincere affection ; regarding him in the light of a beloved brother.

In a fortnight, I was able to walk abroad, and was quite impatient to undertake my Yorkshire journey.

Harrison was engaged as a writer in the office of a respectable solicitor in Lincoln’s Inn Fields, and we promised to correspond regularly with each other during my absence.

He generously divided with me the little money he possessed, and bidding God bless and prosper my journey, he pressed me to his warm, noble heart and bade me farewell.

I mounted the York stage, and for the first time in my life, bade adieu to London and its environs.

CHAPTER XXI.

MY VISIT TO MONCTON PARK.

It was a fine, warm, balmy evening in May—green delicious May. With what delight I gazed abroad upon the face of Nature. Every scene was new to me, and awakened feelings of curiosity and pleasure.

Just out of a sick-bed, and after having been confined for weeks in a dusky, badly ventilated and meanly furnished garret, my heart actually bounded with rapture, and, I drank in health and hope from the fresh breeze that swept the hair from my pale brow and hollow cheeks.

Ah, glorious Nature ! beautiful, purest of all that is pure and holy. Thou visible perfection of the invisible God. I was young then, and am now old, but never did I find a genuine love of thee, dwelling in the heart of a deceitful, wicked man. To love thee, we must adore the God who made thee ; and however sin may defile what originally He pronounced good, when we return with child-like simplicity to thy breast, we find the happiness and peace which a loving parent can alone bestow.

Nothing remarkable occurred during my journey. The coach, in due time, deposited me at the gates of the Lodge, in which my poor friend Harrison had first seen the light.

An involuntary shudder ran through me, when I recognized old Dinah North, standing within the porch of the cottage.

She instantly knew me, and drew back with a malignant scowl.

Directing the coachman to leave my portmanteau at the village inn, until called for, I turned up the broad avenue of oaks that led to the Hall.

The evening was calm and lovely. The nightingale was pouring his first love-song to the silent dewy groves. The perfume of the primrose and violet made every swelling knoll redolent of sweets. I paused often, during my walk, to admire the beauty of a scene so new to me.

Those noble hills and vales; that bright-sweeping river; those bowering woods, just bursting into verdure, and that princely mansion, rising proudly into the clear blue air—all would be mine, could I but vindicate my mother's honor, and prove to the world that I was the offspring of lawful wedlock.

I felt no doubt myself upon the subject. Truth may be obscured for a while, but cannot long remain hid. The innate consciousness of my mother's moral rectitude, never for a moment left my mind. A proud conviction of her innocence, which, I was certain, time would make clear.

Full of these reflections, I approached the Hall. It was an old-fashioned building, which had been created during the wars of York and Lancaster, now venerable with the elemental war of ages, and might, in its day, have stood the shock of battle and siege. It was a fine old place, and associated as it was with the history of the past, sent a thrill of superstitious awe through my heart.

For upwards of three hundred years it had been the birth-place of my family. Here they had lived and flourished as lords of the soil. Here, too, most of them had died, and been gathered into one common burial-place, in the vault of the picturesque gothic church, which stood embosomed in trees not far from the old feudal mansion.

While I, the rightful heir of the demesne, with a soul as large,—with heart and hand equal to do and dare, all that they

in their day and generation had accomplished—approached the old home, poor and friendless, with a stigma upon the good name which legally I might never be able to efface.

But, courage, Geoffrey Moncton! He who first added the appendage of Sir to that name, rode among the victors at the battle of Cressy, and the war-shout of one of his descendants rang out defiantly on the bloody field of Agincourt. Why need you despair! England wants soldiers yet, and if you fail in establishing your claims to that name and its proud memories, win one, as others have done before you, at the cannon's mouth.

I sent up my card, which gained me instant admittance. I was shown into the library, which Harrison had so often described. A noble old room pannelled to the ceiling, with carved oak now almost black with age.

Here I found the Baronet engaged with his daughter in a game at chess.

He rose to meet me with evident marks of pleasure, and introduced me to Miss Moncton, as a young cousin, in whom he felt much interested, and one with whom he hoped to see her better acquainted.

With a soft blush, and a smile of inexpressible sweetness, the little fairy, for she was almost as diminutive in stature, bade me welcome.

Her face, though very pleasing, was neither striking nor beautiful. It was, however, exquisitely feminine, and beaming with intelligence, dignity and truth. Her large, dark, soul-lighted eyes were singularly beautiful. Her complexion, too fair and pale for health; the rich ruby-colored full lips and dazzling teeth, forming a painful contrast with the pure white cheeks, shaded by a dark cloud of raven tresses, that, parting on either side of her lofty brow, flowed in rich curls down her snowy neck, and over her marble shoulders to her waist.

Her figure in miniature, comprised all that was graceful and lovely in woman ; and her frank, unsophisticated manners rendered her, in spite of a faulty nose and mouth, very attractive.

After exchanging a few sentences, Miss Moncton withdrew, and I lost no time in explaining to her father the cause of my visit—the manner in which I had been treated by my uncle, my recent illness, and the utter friendlessness of my present position.

“ You told me, sir, to come to you at any crisis of difficulty, for advice and assistance. I have done so, and shall feel most grateful for your counsels in the present emergency. I am willing and able to work for my bread; I only want an opening to be made in order to get my own living.”

“ Your profession, Geoffrey ; why not stick to that ? ”

“ Most gladly would I do so, had not Robert Moncton put the finishing stroke to his dastardly tyranny, by tearing my indentures, and by this malicious act destroyed the labor of seven years.”

“ Curse him ! the scoundrel ! the mean, cowardly scoundrel ! ” cried Sir Alexander, striking the table with such violence with his clenched hand, that kings, queens, knights, bishops and commoners made a general movement to the other side of the chess-board. “ Never mind, Geoffrey, my boy, give me your hand—I will be your friend—will restore you to your rights, if it costs me the last shilling in my purse—ay, or the last drop in my veins. Let the future, for a short time, take care of itself. Make this your home ; look upon me as your father, and we shall yet live to see this villain reap the reward of his evil deeds.”

“ Generous, noble man ! ” I cried, while tears of joy and gratitude rolled down my cheeks, “ how can I ever hope to repay you for such disinterested goodness ? ”

“ By never alluding to the subject, Geoffrey. Give me back the love your father once felt for me, and I shall be more than

repaid. Besides, my lad, I am neither so good nor so disinterested as you give me credit for. I hate, detest, despise that uncle of yours, and I know the best way to annoy him is to befriend you, and get you safe out of his villainous clutches. This is hardly doing as I would be done by, but I can't help it. No one blames another for taking a fly out of a spider's web, when the poor devil is shrieking for help, although he be the spider's lawful prey. But who does not applaud a man for rescuing his fellow man from the grasp of a cannibal—and that Robert Moncton is a regular man-eater—a wretch who grows fat upon the substance of his neighbors."

I could hardly help laughing at this outbreak of temper on the part of my worthy kinsman.

"By the by, Geoffrey," said he, "have you dined?"

"At the last inn we stopped at on the road."

"The Hart ; a place not very famous for good cheer. Their beef is generally as hard as their deer's horns. Let me order up refreshments."

"By no means. You forget, Sir Alexander, that of late I have not been much used to good living. The friend on whose charity I have been boarding is a poor fellow like myself."

"Well, we must have our chat over a glass of old wine."

He rang the bell. The wine was soon placed upon the table, and most excellent it proved. I was weak from my long confinement to a sick chamber, and tired with my journey ; I never enjoyed a glass of wine so much in my life.

"What do you think of Moncton, Geoffrey?"

"It is a glorious old place."

"Wish it were yours—don't you ? Confess the truth, now."

"Some fifty years hence," I said, laughing.

"You would be too old to enjoy it, Geoff ; but wait patiently God's good time, and it may be yours yet. There was a period in my life ;" and he sighed a long, deep, regretful sigh," when I

hoped that a son of mine would be master here, but as that cannot be, and I am doomed to leave no male heir to my name and title, I know no one whom I would rather see in the old place than my cousin Edward's son."

"Your attachment to my father must have been great, when, after so many years, you extend it to his son."

"Yes, Geoffrey, I loved that wild, mad-cap father of yours better than I ever loved one of my own sex ; but I suffered one rash action to separate hearts which were formed by nature to understand and appreciate each other. You are not acquainted with this portion of the family history. Pass the bottle this way, and I will enlighten your ignorance."

"When your grandfather, in the plenitude of his worldly wisdom, for he had a deal of the fox in his character, left the guardianship of his sons to his aged father, it was out of no respect for the old gentleman, who had cast him off rather unceremoniously, when his plebeian tastes led him to prefer being a rich citizen, rather than a poor gentleman ; but he found, that though he had amassed riches, he had lost caste, and he hoped by this act to restore his sons, for whom he had acquired wealth, to their proper position in society.

"My grandfather, Sir Robert, grumbled a good deal at being troubled with the guardianship of the lads in his old age. But when he saw those youthful scions of his old house, he was so struck with their beauty and talents, that from that hour they held an equal place in his affections with myself, the only child of his eldest son, and heir to his estates.

"I was an extravagant, reckless young fellow of eighteen, when my cousins first came to live at Moncton ; and I hailed their advent with delight. Edward, I told you before, had been an old chum of mine at school ; and when Robert was placed in a lawyer's office, he accompanied me to college to finish my education. He was intended to fill his father's place in the mer

cantile world, but he had little talent or inclination for such a life. All his tastes were decidedly aristocratic, and I fear that my expensive and dissipated habits operated unfavorably on his open, generous, social disposition.

“With a thousand good qualities, and possessing excellent talents, Edward Moncton was easily led astray by the bad example of others. He was a fine musician, had an admirable voice, a brilliant wit, and great fluency of speech, which can scarcely be called advantageous gifts, to those who don’t know how to make a proper use of them.

“He was the life of the society in which we moved, courted and admired wherever he went, and a jolly time we had of it, I can tell you, in those classical abodes of learning and sin.

“Edward gave me his whole heart, and I loved him with the most entire affection. But, though I saw that my example acted most perniciously on his easy disposition, I wanted the moral courage to give up a course of gaiety and vice, in order to save him from ruin.

“Poor Edward !—I would give worlds to recall the past. But the bad seed was sown, and in time we reaped the bitter fruits.

“With all my faults—I was never a gambler ; women, wine, and extravagant living, were my chief derelictions from the paths of rectitude.

“But even while yielding to these temptations, I was neither an habitual drunkard nor a heartless seducer of innocence, though I frequented haunts, where both characters were constantly found, and ranked many such men among my chosen friends and associates. My moral guilt, was perhaps as great as theirs ; for it is vain for a man to boast of his not being intemperate, because nature has furnished him with nerves, which enable him to drink, in defiance to reason, quantities which would deprive the larger portion of men of their senses.

"Your father thought, boylike, for he was full three years my junior, to prove his title to manhood by following closely in my steps, and too soon felt the evil effects of such a leader. He wasted his health in debauchery, and wine maddened him. The gaming-table held out its allurements, he wanted fortitude to resist its temptation, and was the loser to a considerable amount.

"He kept this a secret from me. He was a minor, and he feared that it might reach my grandfather's ears, and that Sir Robert would stop the supplies, until his debts were paid.

"I heard of it through a mutual friend, and very consistently imagined the crime far greater than any that I had committed.

"The night before we left college, I followed him to his favorite rendezvous, which was held in the rooms of a certain young nobleman, unknown to the authorities, where students who were known to belong to wealthy parents, met to play hazard and écarté, and lose more money at a sitting, than could be replaced by the economy of years.

"I was not one of Lord ——'s clique, and I sent my card to Edward by a friend, requesting to speak to him on a matter of importance. After some delay, he came out to me. He was not pleased at being disturbed, and was much flushed with wine.

"'What do you want, Alick?' he said, in no very gentle tones.

"'I want you, to come and help me prepare for our journey to-morrow.'

"'There will be plenty of time for that, by-and-by. I am engaged, and don't choose to be dictated to like a school-boy.'

"'You are mad,' said I, taking hold of his arm, 'to go there at all. Those fellows will cheat you out of every penny you have.'

"'That's my own look-out. I tell you once for all, Alick, I don't choose you to ride rough-shod over me, because you fancy

yourself superior. I will do as I please. I have lost a deal of money to-night, and I mean to play on until I win it back.'

" 'You will only lose more. You are not in a fit state to deal with sharpers. You are so tipsy now, you can hardly stand.'

"As I said this, I put my arm around him to lead him away, when he, maddened I suppose by drink and his recent losses, burst from me, and turning sharp round, struck me a violent blow on the face. 'Let that satisfy you, whether I am drunk or sober,' and with a bitter laugh, he returned to the party he had quitted.

"Geoffrey, I felt that blow in my heart. The disgrace was little in comparison to the consciousness that it came from his hand—the hand of the friend I loved. I could have returned the injury with tenfold interest. But I did nothing of the sort. I stood looking after him with dim eyes and a swelling heart, repeating to myself—

" 'Is it possible that Edward struck me?'

"That blow, however, achieved a great moral reformation. It led me to think—to examine my past life, and to renounce for ever those follies, which I now felt were debasing to both soul and body, and unworthy the pursuit of any rational creature.

"The world expected me, as a gentleman, to ask satisfaction of Edward for the insult I had received.

"I set the world and its false laws at defiance.

"I returned to my lodgings, and wrote him a brief note, telling him that I forgave him, and gently remonstrating with him on the violence of his conduct.

"Instead of answering, or apologizing for what he had done, he listened to the advice of a pack of senseless idiots, who denounced me as a coward, and lauded his rash act to the skies.

"To seek a reconciliation, would be to lose his independence, they said, and prove to the world that he had been in the wrong.

"I, on my part, was too proud to solicit his friendship, and left London before the effort of mutual friends had effected a change in his feelings.

"Perhaps, as the injurer, he never forgave me for being the originator of the quarrel—be that as it may, we never met again. My grandfather died shortly after. I formed an unfortunate attachment to a person far beneath me in rank, and but for the horror of entailing upon myself her worthless mother, would certainly have made her my wife.

"To avoid falling into this snare, I went abroad for several years, and ultimately married a virtuous and lovely woman, and became a happy husband and father, and I hope a better man."

The Baronet ceased speaking for a few minutes, then said with a half smile :

"Geoff, men are sad fools. After losing that angel, I came very near marrying my old flame, who was a widow at the time, and as handsome as ever. She died most opportunely, I am now convinced, for my comfort and respectability, and I gave up all idea of taking a second wife."

This account tallied exactly with Harrison's story, which had given me a key to the Baronet's history. I inquired, rather anxiously, if he and my father remained unreconciled up to the period of his death.

"I wrote to him frequently, Geoffrey, when time had healed the wound he inflicted on my heart, but he never condescended to reply to any of my communications. I have since thought that he *did* write, and that his brother Robert, who was always jealous of our friendship, destroyed the letters. I assure you, that this unnatural estrangement formed one of the saddest

events in my life ; and for the love I still bear his memory, I will never desert his orphan son."

I thanked the worthy Baronet again and again, for the generous treatment I had received from him, and we parted at a late hour, mutually pleased with each other.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SAD EVENT.

A FEW weeks' residence found me quite at home at the Hall. My new-found relatives treated me with the affectionate familiarity that exists between old and long-tried friends. I ceased to feel myself the despised *poor relation*—a creature rarely loved and always in the way, expected to be the recipient of all the kicks and cuffs of the family to whom his ill-fortune has made him an attaché, and to return the base coin with smiles and flattering speeches.

Of all lots in this hard world, the hardest to bear must be that of a domestic sneak ; war, war to the knife is better than such humiliating servitude. I could neither fawn nor cringe, and the Baronet, who was a high-spirited man himself, loved me for my independence.

The summer had just commenced. No hunting, no shooting to wile away an idle hour. But Sir Alexander was as fond of old Izaak Walton's gentle craft, as that accomplished piscator, and we often rose at early dawn to stroll through the dewy pastures to the stream that crossed the park, which abounded with trout, and I soon became an excellent angler, and could hook my fish in the most scientific manner.

When the days were not propitious for our sport, I accompanied Sir Alexander in his rides, in visiting his model farms, examining the progress of his crops, the making of hay, the improved breeds of sheep and cattle, and all such healthy and rural employments, in which he took a patriarchal delight.

Margaretta generally accompanied us on these expeditions. She was an excellent equestrian, and managed her high-bred roan with much skill and ease, never disturbing the pleasure of the ride by nervous or childish fears.

"Madge is a capital rider!" would the old Baronet exclaim. "I taught her myself. There is no affectation—no show-off airs in her riding. She does that as she does everything else, in a quiet, natural way."

The enjoyment of our country life was seldom disturbed by visitors. All the great folks were in London; the beauties of nature possessing far less attractions for them than the sophisticated gaieties of the season in town.

If his youth had been dissipated, Sir Alexander courted retirement in age, and was perfectly devoted to the quiet happiness of a domestic life.

Margaretta, who shared all his tastes, and whose presence appeared necessary to his existence, had spent one season in London, but cared so little for the pleasures of the metropolis, that she resisted the urgent entreaties of her female friends to accompany them to town a second time.

"I hate London, Cousin Geoffrey. There is no room in its crowded scenes for nature and truth. Every one seems intent upon acting a lie, and living in defiance of their reason and better feelings. I never could feel at home there. I mistrusted myself and every one else, and never knew what true happiness was, until I returned to the unaffected simplicity of a country life."

These sentiments were fully reciprocated by me, who had passed, within the smoky walls of the huge metropolis, the most unhappy period of my life.

Some hours, every day, were devoted by Sir Alexander to business, during which he was closely closeted with Mr. Hilton, his steward, and to disturb him at such times was regarded by him as an act of high treason.

During these hours, Margaretta and I were left to amuse ourselves in the best manner we could. She was a fine pianist. I had inherited my father's passion for music, and was never tired of listening to her while she played. If the weather was unfavorable for a ride or stroll in the park, I read aloud to her, while she painted groups of flowers from nature, for which she had an exquisite taste.

The time fled away only too fast, and this mingling of amusement and mental occupation was very delightful to me, whose chief employment for years had been confined to musty parchments in a dull, dark office.

Our twilight rambles through the glades of the beautiful park, at that witching hour when both eye and heart are keenly alive to sights and sounds of beauty, possessed for me the greatest charm.

I loved—but only as a brother loves—the dear, enthusiastic girl, who leaned so confidently on my arm, whose glorious eyes, lighted up from the very fountain of passion and feeling, were raised to mine as if to kindle in my breast the fire of genius that emanated from her own.

Her vivid imagination, fostered in solitude, seized upon everything bright and beautiful in nature, and made it her own.

“The lips of song burst open
And the words of fire rushed out.”

At such moments it was impossible to regard Margaretta with indifference. I could have loved—nay, adored—had not my mind been preoccupied with a fairer image.

Margaretta was too great a novice in affairs of the heart, to notice the guarded coolness of my homage. My society afforded her great pleasure, and she wanted the common-place tact of her sex to disguise it from me.

Dear, lovely, confiding Margaretta, how beautiful does your simple truth and disinterested affection appear, as I look back through the long vista of years, and find in the world so few who resemble thee !

Towards the close of a hot day in June we visited the fragrant fields of new-mown hay, and Margaretta tired herself by chasing a pair of small, coquettish blue butterflies, who hovered along the hedge, that bounded the dusty highway, like living gems, and not succeeding in capturing the shy things, she proposed leaving the road, and returning home through the Park.

“With all my heart,” said I. “We will rest under your favorite beech, while you, dear Madge, sing with your sweet voice, the

“Drowsy world to rest.”

We crossed a stile and entered one of the broad, green arcades of the glorious old park.

For some time we reposed upon the velvet sward, beneath Margaretta’s favorite tree. The slanting red beams of the setting sun scarcely forced their way through the thickly interlaced boughs of the forest. The sparkling wavelets of the river ran brawling at our feet, fighting their way among the sharp rocks that opposed a barrier to their downward course. We bathed our temples in the cool, clear waters. Margaretta forgot the dusty road, the independent blue butterflies, and her recent fatigue.

“There is no music after all like the music of nature, Geoffrey,” she said, untying her straw bonnet, and throwing it on the grass beside her, while she shook a shower of glossy black ringlets back from her small oval face.

“Not that it is the instrument, but the soul that breathes through it, that makes the music. And Nature, pouring her soul into these waves, and stirring with her plaintive sighs these

branches above us, awakens sounds which find an echo in the heart of all her children, who remain true to the teachings of the divine mother." Then turning suddenly to me, she said, "Geoffrey, do you sing?"

"To please myself. I play upon the flute much better than I sing. During the last half year I remained with my uncle I took lessons of an excellent master, and having a good ear, and being passionately fond of music, I gained considerable proficiency. I had been an amateur performer for years."

"And you never told me one word of this before."

"I did not wish to display all my trifling stock of accomplishments at once," said I, with a smile. "Those who possess but little are wise to reserve a small portion of what they have. You shall test its value the next rainy day."

"In the absence of the flute, Geoffrey, you must give me a song. A song that harmonizes with this witching hour and holiday time o' the year."

"Then it must necessarily be a love song," said I; "youth and spring being the best adapted to inspire the joyousness of love."

"Call not love joyous, Geoffrey; it is a sad and fearful thing to love. Love that is sincere is a hidden emotion of the heart; it shrinks from vain laughter, and is most eloquent when silent, or only revealed by tears."

I started, and turned an anxious gaze upon her pale, spiritual face.

What right had I to be jealous of her? I who was devoted to another. Yet jealous I was, and answered rather pettishly:

"You talk feelingly, fair cousin, as if you had experienced the passion you describe. Have you tasted the bitter sadness of disappointed love?"

"I did not say that." And she blushed deeply. "You chose to infer it."

I did not reply. The image of Harrison rose in my mind. For the first time I saw a strong likeness between them. Such a likeness as is often found between persons who strongly assimilate—whose feelings, tastes, and pursuits are the same.

Was it possible that she had loved him? I was anxious to find out if my suspicions were true; and without any prelude or apology commenced singing a little air that George had taught me, both music and words being his own.

SONG.

“I loved you long and tenderly,
I urged my suit with tears;
But coldly and disdainfully
You crushed the hope of years.
I gazed upon your glowing cheek,
I met your flashing eye;
The words I strove in vain to speak
Were smothered in a sigh.

I swore to love you faithfully,
Till death should bid us part;
But proudly and reproachfully,
You spurned a loyal heart.
Despair is bold—you turned away,
And wished we ne’er had met,
Through many a long and weary day
That parting haunts me yet.

Nor think that chilling apathy,
Can passion’s tide repress—
Ah, no, with fond idolatry,
I would not love thee less.
Your image meets me in the crowd,
Like some fair beam of light,
That bursting through its sombre cloud
Makes glad the brow of night.

Then turn my hard captivity,
Nor let me sue in vain,
Whilst with unshaken constancy,
I seek your feet again.
One smile of thine can cheer the heart,
That only beats to be
United, ne'er again to part—
My life ! my soul !—from thee.

I sang my best, and was accounted by all the young men of my acquaintance, to have a fine manly voice. But I was not rewarded by a single word or encouraging smile.

Margaretta's head was bowed upon her hands, and tears were streaming fast through her slender fingers.

"Margaret, dearest Margaret !" for in speaking to her, I always dropped the Italianized termination of her name. "Are you ill. Do speak to me."

She still continued to weep.

"I wish I had not sung that foolish song."

"It was only sung too well, Geoffrey." And she slowly raised her head and put back the hair from her brow. "Ah, what sad—what painful recollections does that song call up. But with these, you have nothing to do. I will not ask you how you became acquainted with that air. But I request as a great favor, that you never sing or play it to me again."

She relapsed into silence, which I longed but did not know how to break. At length she rose from the bank on which we had been seated, resumed her bonnet, and expressed a wish to return to the Hall.

"The night has closed in very fast," she said, "or is the gloom occasioned by the shadow of the trees?"

"It is only a few minutes past seven, I replied, looking at my watch. "The hay-makers have not yet left their work." We had followed the course of the stream, on our homeward

path, and now emerged into an open space in the Park. The sudden twilight which had descended upon us was caused by a heavy pile of thunder clouds that hung frowning over the woods, and threatened to overtake us before we could reach the Hall.

"How still and deep the waters lie," said Margaretta. "There is not a breath of wind to ruffle them or stir the trees. The awful stillness which precedes a storm inspires me with more dread, than when it launches forth with all its terrific powers."

"Hark ! There's the first low peal of thunder, and the trees are all trembling and shivering in the electric blast that follows it. How sublimely beautiful, is this magnificent war of elements."

"It is very true, dear cousin, but if you stand gazing at the clouds, we shall both get wet."

"Geoffrey," said Margaretta, laughing, "there is nothing poetical about you."

"I have been used to the commonest prose all my life, Madge. But here we are at the fishing-house, we had better stow ourselves away with your father's nets and tackles until this heavy shower is over."

No sooner said than done. We crossed a rustic bridge which spanned the stream, and ascending a flight of stone steps, reached a small rough-cast building, open in front, with a bench running round three sides of it, and a rude oak table in the middle, which was covered with fishing-rods, nets, and other tackle belonging to the gentle craft.

From this picturesque shed Sir Alexander, in wet weather, could follow his favorite sport, as the river ran directly below, and it was considered the best spot for angling, the water expanding here into a deep still pool, which was much frequented by the finny tribes.

We were both soon seated in the ivy-covered porch, the honey-suckle hanging its perfumed tassels, dripping with the rain, above our heads, while the clematis and briar-rose gave out to the shower a double portion of delicate incense.

The scene was in unison with Margaretta's poetical temperament. She enjoyed it with her whole heart ; her beautiful eyes brimful of love and adoration.

The landscape varied every moment. Now all was black and lowering ; lightnings pierced with their arrowy tongues the heavy foliage of the frowning woods, and loud peals of thunder reverberated among the distant hills ; and now a solitary sunbeam struggled through a rift in the heavy cloud, and lighted up the gloomy scene with a smile of celestial beauty.

Margaretta suddenly grasped my arm ; I followed the direction of her eye, and beheld a tall female figure, dressed in deep mourning, pacing to and fro on the bridge we had just crossed.

Her long hair, unconfined by cap or bandage, streamed in wild confusion round her wan and wasted features, and regardless of the pelting of the pitiless storm, she continued to hurry backwards and forwards, throwing her hands into the air, and striking her breast like one possessed.

"Who is she ?" I whispered.

"The wreck of all that once was beautiful," sighed Margaretta. "It is Alice Mornington, the daughter of one of my father's tenants."

"Alice Mornington ! Good Heavens ! is that poor mad-woman Alice Mornington ?"

Margaretta looked surprised.

"Do you know this poor girl ?"

I felt that I had nearly betrayed myself, and stammered out "Not personally ; I know something of her private history, which I heard accidentally before I came here."

"Geoffrey, no sister ever loved another more devotedly than

I loved that poor girl—than I love her still. After she forsook the path of virtue, my father forbade me having the least intercourse with her. My heart bleeds to see her thus. I cannot stand calmly by and witness her misery. Stay here, while I go and speak to her.”

With noiseless tread she glided down the stone steps, and gained the bridge. The quick eye of the maniac (for such she appeared to be) however, had detected the movement, and with a loud shriek she flung herself into the water.

To spring to the bank, to plunge into the stream, and as she rose to the surface, to bear the wretched girl to the shore, was but the work of a moment. Brief as the time was that had elapsed between the rash act and her rescue, she was already insensible, and with some difficulty I succeeded in carrying her up the steep stairs to the fishing-house.

It was some seconds before suspended animation returned, and when at length the large blue eyes unclosed, Alice awoke to consciousness on the bosom of the fond and weeping Margaretta.

“Oh, Miss Moncton!” sobbed the poor girl, “why did you save me—why did you recall me to a life of misery—why did you not let me die when the agony of death was already over?”

“Dear Alice!” said Margaret, soothingly, “what tempted you to drown yourself? You know it is wrong to commit a deed like this.”

“I was driven to desperation by the neglect and cruelty of those whom I love best on earth.”

“Do not reproach me, dear Alice,” said Margaret, almost choking with emotion. “It is not in my nature to desert those I love. My heart has been with you in all your sorrows, but I dared not disobey my father.”

“Oh, Miss Moncton, it was not of you I spoke. I could not expect you to countenance one whom the whole neighbor-

hood joined to condemn. If others had only treated me half as well, I should not have been reduced to such straits."

"Alice, you must not stay here in these wet clothes. You will get your death. Lean on my arm. I will take you home."

"Home! I have no home. I dare not go home. *She* is there! and she will taunt me with this, and drive me mad again."

"Then come to the Hall, Alice; I will talk to you there, and no one shall hear us but your own Margaret."

"God bless you, Miss Moncton, for all your kindness. It would, indeed, be a great relief to tell you all the grief that fills my heart. Yes, I will go with you to-night. The morrow may take care of the things that belong to it. Now, or never. There may be no to-morrow on earth for me."

"Cheer up, poor heart. There may be happiness in store for you yet," said Margaret.

"For me?" and Alice looked up with an incredulous smile; so sad, so dreary, it was enough to make you weep, that wild glance passing over her wan features. "Oh, never again for me."

She suffered herself to be led between us to the Hall. Margaret directing me by a path that led through the gardens to a private entrance at the back of the house. Alice was completely exhausted by her former violence. I had to put my arm round her slender waist, to support her up the marble staircase. I left her with Margaret, at her chamber-door, and retired to my own apartment, to change my wet clothes.

Miss Moncton did not come down to tea.

Sir Alexander was in the fidgets about her. "Where's Madge? What the deuce is the matter with the girl. She went out with you, Geoffrey, as fresh as a lark. I will hold you responsible for her non-appearance."

I thought it best to relate what had happened. He looked very grave.

"A sad business. A very sad business, I wish Madge

would keep her hands clear of that girl. I am sorry for her, too. But you know, Geoffrey, we cannot set the opinion of the world entirely at defiance. And what a man may do with impunity, a young lady must not."

"Miss Moncton has acted with true Christian charity. It is a thousand pities that such examples are so rare."

"Don't think I blame Madge, Geoffrey. She is a dear, good girl, a little angel. But it is rather imprudent of her to bring the mistress of Theophilus home to the house. What will Mrs. Grundy say?"

"Margaret has no Mrs. Grundies," said I, rather indignantly. "She will not admit such vulgar, common-place wretches into her society. To the pure in heart all things are pure."

"Well done ! young champion of dames. You will not suffer Margareta to be blamed without taking her part, I see."

"Particularly, sir, when I know and feel that she is in the right."

"She and I must have a serious talk on this subject, to-morrow. In the meanwhile, Geoff, bring here the chess-board, and let us get through a dull evening in the best way we can."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DISCOVERY.

THE next morning I received from Margaretta, a circumstantial detail of what had passed between Alice and her on the previous evening.

“After I undressed and got her to bed, she fell into a deep sleep, which lasted until midnight. I was reading by the table, not feeling at all inclined to rest. Hearing her moving, I went to her, and sat down on the bed, and asked how she felt herself.

“‘Better in mind, Miss Moncton, but far from well. My head aches badly, and I have a dull pain in my chest.’

“‘You have taken cold, Alice. I must send for the doctor.’

“‘Oh! no, no. He could do me no good—mine is a malady of the heart. If my mind were at ease, I should be quite well. I do not wish to get well. The sooner I die the better.’

“‘Alice, you must not talk so. It is very sinful.’

“‘You are right. I am a great sinner. I know it only too well. But I cannot repent. All is dark here,’ and she laid her hand upon her head. ‘I cannot see my way through this thick darkness—this darkness that can be felt. You know, Miss Moncton, what the Bible says, “The light of the wicked shall be put out in obscure darkness.” My light of life has been extinguished, and the night of eternal darkness has closed over me.’

“‘We must pray to God, Alice, to enlighten this awful darkness.’

“ ‘Pray !—I cannot pray. I am too hard—too proud to pray. God has forsaken and left me to myself. If I could discern one ray of light—one faint glimmer only, I might cherish hope.’

“ ‘There was something so truly melancholy, in this description of the state of her mind, Geoffrey, that I could not listen to her with dry eyes.

“ ‘Alice, for her part, shed no tears, but regarded my emotions with a look of mingled pity and surprise, while the latent insanity, under which I am sure she is laboring, kindled a glow on her death-pale face. Rising slowly in the bed, she grasped my arm.

“ ‘Why do you weep? Do you dare to think me guilty of that nameless crime? Margaretta Moncton, you should know me better. Don’t you remember the ballad we once learned to repeat, when we were girls together?—

“ ‘Not mine to scowl a guilty eye,
Or bear the brand of shame ;
Oh, God ! to brook the taunting look
Of Fillan’s wedded dame.

“ ‘But the lady bore the brand in spite of all her boasting. But I do not. I am a wife—*His* lawful wedded wife, and my boy was no child of shame, and he dare not deny it. And yet,’ she continued, falling back upon her pillow, and clutching the bed-clothes in her convulsive grasp, ‘*he* spurned me from him—*me*, his wife—the mother of his child. Yes, Miss Moncton, spurned me from his presence, with hard words and bitter taunts. I could have borne the loss of his love, for I have long ceased to respect him. But this—this has maddened me.’

“ ‘I was perfectly astonished at his unexpected disclosure. Seeing doubt expressed in my face, she grew angry and vehement.

“ ‘It is true. Why do you doubt my word? I scorn to utter a falsehood. When, Miss Moncton, did I ever during our long friendship deceive you?’

“ ‘Never, Alice. But your story seemed improbable. Like you, I am in the habit of speaking fearlessly my mind.’

“ ‘She drew from her bosom a plain gold ring, suspended by a black ribbon round her neck.

“ ‘With this ring we were married in Moncton church. Our bans were published there, in your father’s hearing, but he took no heed of the parties named. I have the certificate of my marriage, and Mr. Selden, who married us under the promise of secrecy, can prove the truth of what I say. The marriage was private, because Theophilus was afraid of incurring his father’s anger.’

“ ‘And what has become of your child, Alice?’

“ ‘He is dead,’ she said, mournfully. ‘He caught cold, during a long journey to London, which I undertook unknown to my grandmother, in the hope of moving the hard heart of my cruel husband. It was of no earthly use. I lost my child, and the desolate heart of the forsaken, is now doubly desolate.’

“ ‘The allusion to her baby seemed to soften the iron obstinacy of her grief, and she gave way to a passionate burst of tears. This, I have no doubt tranquillized her mind. She grew calmer and more collected—consented to take some refreshments, and then unfolded to me at length, the tale of her wrongs.

“ ‘Oh, Geoffrey! what a monster that Theophilus Moncton must be. I may be wrong to say so, but I almost wish that poor Alice were not his wife, and so will you, after you have heard all that I have to tell you.

“ ‘Theophilus, it appears, from her statements, took a fancy to Alice, when she was a mere child, and his passion strengthened for her at every visit he subsequently paid to the Hall.

“ ‘After using every inducement to overcome her integrity, rather than lose his victim, he proposed a private marriage.

“ ‘This gratified the ambition of the unfortunate girl, who knew, that in case of my father dying without male issue, her

lover would be the heir of Moncton. She was only too glad to close with his offer, and they were married in the parish church by the Rev. Mr. Selden, all the parties necessary to the performance of the ceremony being sworn and bribed to secrecy.

“For a few months Theophilus lavished on his young bride great apparent affection, and at this period, his visits to the Hall were very frequent.

“Alice, who had always been treated like a sister by me, now grew pert and familiar. This alteration in her former respectful manner greatly displeased my father. ‘These Morningtons,’ he said, ‘are unworthy of the kindness we have bestowed upon them, and like all low people, when raised above their station, they become insolent and familiar.’

“Rumor had always ascribed young Moncton’s visits to the Hall, to an attachment he had formed for me. The gossips of the village changed their tone, and his amour with Alice became the scandal of the day.

“My father having ascertained that there was some truth in these infamous reports, sent me to spend my first winter in London, with Lady Grey, my mother’s only sister, and told Dinah North that her grand-daughter for the future would be considered as a stranger by his family.

“I wrote to Alice from London, telling her that I could not believe the evil things said of her; and begged her, as she valued my love and friendship, to lose no time in clearing up the aspersions cast upon her character.

“To my earnest and affectionate appeal, she returned no answer, and all intercourse between us ceased.

“Three months after this, she became a mother, and my father forbade me to mention her name.

“It appears, that from this period she saw little of her husband. That he, repenting bitterly of his sudden marriage, treated her with coldness and neglect

“Dinah North, who was privy to her marriage, took a journey to London, to try and force Mr. Moncton to acknowledge her granddaughter as his son’s wife ; in case of his refusal threatening to expose conduct of his which would not bear investigation.

“Dinah failed in her mission—and my dear father, pitying the condition of the forlorn girl, sought himself an interview with Mr. Moncton on her behalf, in which he begged your uncle to use his influence with Theophilus, to make her his wife.

“The young man had been sent abroad, and Mr. Moncton received my father’s proposition with indignation and contempt, and threatened to disinherit Theophilus if he dared to take such a step without his knowledge and consent.

“In the meanwhile, the unfortunate Alice, withering beneath the blighting influence of hope deferred, and unmerited neglect, lost her health, her beauty, and by her own account, at times her reason.

“Hearing that her husband had returned to England, she wrote to him a letter full of forgiveness, and breathing the most devoted affection—and told him of the birth of his son, whom she described, with all a mother’s doting love.

“To this letter she received, after a long and torturing delay, the following unfeeling answer. She gave me this precious document.

“Read it, Geoffrey. It puts me into a fever of indignation ; I cannot read it a second time.”

I took the letter from her hand.

How well I knew that scrupulously neat and feminine specimen of caligraphy. It was an autograph worthy of Queen Elizabeth, so regularly was each letter formed, the lines running in exact parallels ; no flutter of the heart causing the least deviation from the exact rule. It ran as follows :

"Why do you continue to trouble me with letters which are not worth the postage? I hate to receive them, and from this time forward will return them unopened.

"Your best policy is to remain quiet, or I will disown the connection between us, and free myself from your importunity by consigning you to a mad-house.

"T—— M——."

"Unfeeling scoundrel!" I exclaimed; "surely this *affectionate* billet must have destroyed the last spark of affection in the breast of the unhappy girl."

"Women are strange creatures, Geoffrey, and often cling with most pertinacity to those who care little for their regard, while they take a perverse pleasure in slighting those who really love them—so it is with Alice. The worse he treated her, the more vehemently she clung to him. To make a final appeal to his callous heart she undertook the journey to London alone, with her baby in her arms, and succeeded under a feigned name in getting admittance to her husband.

"You know the result. He spurned the wife and child from his presence. The infant was taken sick on its homeward journey, and died shortly after she reached her grandmother's cottage; and she, poor creature, will soon follow it to the grave, for I am convinced that she is dying of a broken heart."

Margaret was quite overcome with this sad relation. Wiping the tears from her eloquent black eyes, and looking me sadly in the face, she said, with great earnestness:

"And now, Geoffrey, what can we do to serve her?"

"Inform Sir Alexander of these particulars. Let him obtain from Alice the legal proofs of her marriage, and force this base Theophilus—this disgrace to the name of a man, and of Moncton, to acknowledge her publicly as his wife. In the meanwhile, I will write to her brother, and inform him of this important discovery."

"Her brother!" and Margaretta turned as pale as death;
"what do you know of Philip Mornington?"

"He is my friend—my dearest, most valued friend."

"Thank God he is alive!"

"And likely to live," said I, leading her to a chair; for we had been standing during our long conversation in the deep recess of the library window. "Margaret, will you be offended if I ask you one question?"

"Not in the least, cousin."

"And will you answer me with your usual candor?"

"Why should you doubt it, Geoffrey?" she said, trembling with agitation.

"Do you love Philip Mornington?"

"I do, Geoffrey—I have loved him from a child, but not in the way you mean—not such love as a girl feels for her lover. I could not think of him for one moment as my husband—no, it is a strange interest I feel in his destiny—I feel as if he were a part of me, as if I had a natural right to love him. He is so like my father, only milder and less impetuous, that I have thought it possible that he might be his natural son—and if so, my brother."

What a relief was this declaration to my mind. I could not, for a moment, doubt its sincerity, and I rejoiced that the dear tender-hearted creature before me, was not likely to wreck her peace in loving one whom she could not wed.

Yet, that she did love some one I felt certain; and though I dared not prosecute the inquiry, it was a problem that I was very anxious to solve.

I left my fair cousin, to write a long letter to George Harrison, in which I duly informed him of all that had taken place since I left London.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MY SECOND INTERVIEW WITH DINAH NORTH.

AN hour had scarcely elapsed, when I received a message from Miss Moncton, requesting my presence in the drawing-room, where I found her engaged in an earnest conversation with Alice, who looked more like a resuscitated corpse, than a living creature ; so pale and death-like were her beautiful features.

She held out her hand, as I approached the sofa on which she was reclining ; and thanked me in low and earnest tones for saving her life. There was an expression of pride, almost aristocratic, on her finely cut lips, which seemed to contradict the gratitude she expressed.

"I was not in my right mind, Mr. Geoffrey,—no one is, I have read and been told, who makes an attempt upon his own life. I had suffered a great calamity, and wanted moral courage to bear it : I trust God will forgive me."

I told her that I deeply sympathized with her unfortunate situation, and would gladly do anything in my power to serve her.

"That is more than Theophilus would do for you. If there is a person whom he hates more than me, it is yourself. You can serve me very materially. Miss Moncton tells me, that you know my brother Philip, intimately."

I nodded assent.

"Write to him, and tell him from me, how sincerely I repent my past conduct to him—that I am not quite the guilty

creature he took me for ; though swayed by minds more daringly wicked to commit evil. Tell him not to avenge my wrongs on Theophilus. There is one in heaven who will be my Avenger—who never lets the thoroughly bad escape unpunished ; and tell him," and she drew a deep sigh—"that Alice Moncton died blessing him."

"Shall I go to London, and bring him down to see you?"

"No, no !" she cried, in evident alarm, "he must not be seen in this neighborhood."

"That would be bringing the dead to life," said I, pointedly. She gave me a furtive look.

"Yes, Alice, Philip told me that dreadful story. I do not wonder at your repugnance to his coming here ; and were it not for your share in the business, I would commit that atrocious woman to take her trial at the next assizes."

"Horrible !" muttered Alice, hiding her face in the sofa pillows. "I did not think that Philip would betray me, after all I did to save his life."

"Your secret is safe with me. I would to God, that other family secrets known to you and Dinah, were in my keeping."

"I wish they were, Mr. Geoffrey, for I have too much upon my conscience, overburdened as it is with the crimes of others. But I cannot tell you many things important for you to know, for my lips are sealed with an oath too terrible to be broken."

"Then I must go to Dinah," I said angrily, "and wrest the truth from her."

Alice burst into a wild laugh—"Rack and faggot would not do it, if she were determined to hold her tongue—nay, she would suffer that tongue to be torn out of her head, before she would confess a crime, unless, indeed, she were goaded on by revenge. Listen, Mr. Geoffrey, to the advice of a dying woman.

"Leave Dinah North to God and her own conscience. Be-

fore many months are over, her hatred to Robert Moncton and his son will tear the reluctant secret from her. Had my son lived," another heavy sigh, "it would have been different. Her ambition, like my love, has become dust and ashes."

"Alice," I said solemnly, "you have no right to withhold knowledge which involves the happiness of others; even for your oath's sake."

"It may be so, but that oath involves an eternal penalty which I dare not bring upon my soul."

"God can absolve from all rash vows."

"Ay, those who believe in Him, who love and trust Him. I believe, simply because I fear. But love and trust,—alas, the comfort, the assurance which springs from faith, was never felt by me."

"Dinah may die, and the secret may perish with her," cried I, growing desperate to obtain information on a subject of such vital importance to my friend—perhaps to me.

"That is nothing to me," she replied, coldly.

"Selfish, ungenerous woman!"

She smiled scornfully. "The world, and your family especially, have given me great encouragement to be liberal."

"Is Philip your brother?" I cried, vehemently, determined to storm the secret out of her.

"What is that to you? Yet, perhaps, if the truth were told, you would be the first to wish it buried in oblivion."

There was a lurking fire in her eye as she said this, that startled me.

"Do you wish to prosecute the inquiry?" she added, with the bitter smile which made her face, though beautiful, very repulsive.

A glance of contempt was my sole answer.

"Well, once for all I will tell you, Mr. Geoffrey, lawyer though you be, that your cross-questioning is useless. What I know about you and yours shall remain unknown, as far as I

am concerned—and shall go down with me to the grave. The memory of my mother is too dear to me for any words of yours to drag from me the trust she reposed in me. You have had your answer. Go—I wish to be alone.”

In vain I argued, entreated, and even threatened. There was too much of the leaven of Old Dinah in her granddaughter’s character for her to listen to reason.

She became violent and obstinate, and put an end to this strange conference by rising, and abruptly leaving the room. I looked after her with feelings less tinctured with compassion than annoyance and contempt.

“Forgive her, Geoffrey,” said Margaret, who had listened in silent astonishment to the conversation; “her reason is disordered; she does not know what she says.”

“The madness of wickedness,” I said, sharply. “She is as wide awake as a fox. It may seem harsh to say so, but I feel little pity for her. She is artful and selfish in the extreme, and deserves her fate. Just review, for a moment, her past life.”

“It will not bear investigation, Geoffrey. Yet, with all these faults I loved her so fondly—love her still, and will never desert her while a hope remains, that through my instrumentality her mind may be diverted to the contemplation of better things.”

“She is not worthy of the trouble you take about her,” said I, shrugging my shoulders. “Have you informed your father of her marriage with Theophilus?”

“Yes, and he was astonished. Theophilus was the last person in the world, he thought, who would commit himself in that way. Papa said, that he would write to Robert Moncton, and make a statement of the facts. I could almost pity him; this news will throw him into such a transport of rage.

“When Robert Moncton feels the most, he says little. He acts with silent, deadly force. He seldom speaks. He will

curse Theophilus in his heart, but speak fair of him to his enemies. I am anxious to know how all this will end."

"My father wanted to see you in the library," said Margaretta. "Your conversation with Alice put it entirely out of my head."

I found Sir Alexander seated at a table, surrounded with papers. If there was one thing my good old friend hated more than another, it was writing letters. "Wise men speak—fools write their thoughts," was a favorite saying of his. He flung the pen pettishly from him as I entered the room.

"Zounds, Geoffrey! I cannot defile paper with writing to that scoundrel. I will see him myself. It will be some satisfaction to witness his chagrin. Who knows, but in the heat of his displeasure, he may say something that will afford a clue to unravel his treachery towards yourself. At all events, I am determined to make the experiment."

"He will make no sign. Robert Moncton never betrays himself."

"To think that his clever Theophilus could make such a low marriage; not but that the girl is far too good for him, and I think the degradation is entirely on her side."

"The pair are worthy of each other," said I.

"You are unjust to Alice, Geoffrey. The girl was a beauty, and so clever, till he spoilt her."

"The tiger is a beautiful animal, and the fox is clever; but we hate the one, despise the other."

The Baronet gave me a curious look.

"How came you to form this character of the girl?"

"Partly from observation; partly from some previous knowledge, obtained from a reliable source, before I left London."

"But what of this journey," I said, anxious to turn the conversation. "Do you seriously contemplate again going up to town?"

"It is already decided. I have ordered the carriage to be at the door by eight to-morrow morning."

"I do not ask you to accompany me, Geoffrey. I have business cut out for you during my absence. You must start to-morrow for Derbyshire, and visit the parish in which your grandfather resided for many years as curate, under the Rev. James Brownson; and where your mother was born. I will supply the necessary funds for the journey."

"And the object of this visit?" I cried, eagerly.

"To take lodgings in ———, or in the neighborhood, and, under a feigned name, prosecute inquiries respecting your mother's marriage. There must still be many persons living to whom Ellen Rivers and her father were well-known, who might give you much valuable information respecting her elopement with your father, and what was said about it by the gossips at the time. If you find the belief general, that they were married, ascertain the church in which the ceremony was said to have been performed—the name of the clergyman who officiated, and the witnesses who were present. All these particulars are of the greatest importance for us to know.

"Take the best riding-horse in the stable, and if your money fails you, draw upon me for more. You may adopt, for the time being, my mother's family name, and call yourself Mr. Tremain, to which address, all letters from the Hall will be sent.

"Should Robert Moncton drop any hints, which can in any way further the object of your search, I will not fail to write you word.

"We will, if you please, start at the same hour to-morrow; each on our different mission; and may God grant us success, and a happy meeting. And, now, you may go and prepare for your adventure."

I had long wished to prosecute this inquiry. Yet, now the moment had arrived, I felt loath to leave the Hall.

The society and presence of Margaretta had become necessary to my happiness. Yet, inconsistently enough, I fancied myself desperately in love with Catharine Lee. I never suspected that my passion for the one was ideal—the first love of a boy ; while that for the latter, was real and tangible.

How we suffer youth and imagination to deceive us in affairs of the heart. We love a name, and invest the person who bears it with a thousand perfections, which have no existence in reality. The object of our idolatry, is not a child of nature, but a creation of fancy, fostered in solitude by ignorance and self-love. Marriages, which are the offspring of first-love, are proverbially unhappy from this very circumstance, which leads us to overrate, during the period of courtship, the virtues of the beloved in the most extravagant manner ; and this species of adoration generally ends in disappointment—too often in disgust.

Boys and girls in their teens, are beings without much reflection. Their knowledge of character, with regard to themselves and others, is too limited and imperfect to enable them to make a judicious choice.

They love the first person who pleases the eye and charms the fancy—for love is a matter of necessity at that age.

Time divests their idol of all its imaginary perfections, and they feel, too late, that they have made a wrong choice.

Though love may laugh at the cold maxims of prudence and reason, yet it requires the full exercise of both qualities to secure for any length of time domestic happiness.

I can reason calmly now, on this exciting subject. But I reasoned not calmly then. I was a creature of passion, and passionate impulses. The woman I loved had no fault in my eyes. To have supposed her liable to the common errors and follies of her sex would have been an act of treason against the deity I worshipped.

I retired to my chamber, and finished my letter to Harrison.

The day wore slowly away, as it always does, when you expect any important event on the morrow.

The evening was bright and beautiful as an evening in June could well be. Margaretta had only been visible at dinner, her time having been occupied between Alice and making preparations for her father's journey.

At tea, she looked languid, and paler than usual, and when we rose from the table I proposed a stroll in the Park. She consented with a smile of pleasure, and we were soon wandering side by side beneath our favorite trees.

"You will feel very lonely during your father's absence, my little cousin?"

"Then you must exert all your powers of pleasing, Geoffrey, to supply his place."

"But I am going too—I leave Moncton at the same time, for an indefinite period."

"Worse and worse," and she tried to smile. It would not do. The tears were in her beautiful eyes. That look of tender inquiry caused a strange swelling at my heart.

"You will not forget me, Margaret?"

"Do you think it such an easy matter, that you deem it necessary to make such a request?"

"I am but a poor relation, whom few persons would regard with other feelings than those of indifference. This I know, is not the case with your excellent father and you. I shall ever regard both with gratitude and veneration—and I feel certain, that should we never meet again, I should always be remembered with affectionate kindness."

"You know not how deservedly dear you are to us both. How much we love you, Geoffrey—and I would fain hope that these sentiments are reciprocal."

Though this was said in perfect simplicity. The flushed cheek,

and down-cast eye, revealed the state of the speaker's heart, I felt—I knew—she loved me. But, madman that I was, out of mere contradiction, I considered myself bound by a romantic attachment, which had never been declared by word or sign, to Catherine Lee.

“You love me, dear Margaret,” I cried, as I clasped her hand in mine, and kissed it with more warmth than the disclosure I was about to make, warranted.

“God knows! how happy this blessed discovery would have made me, had not my affections been pre-engaged.”

A deep blush mantled over her face—she trembled violently as she gently drew her hand from mine—and answered with a modest dignity, which was the offspring of purity and truth,

“I will not deny, Geoffrey, that I love you. That what you have said gives me severe pain. We are not accountable for our affections—I am sorry that I suffered my foolish heart to betray me. Yet, I must love you still, cousin,” she said, weeping. “Your very misfortunes endear you to me. Forget this momentary weakness, and only think of me as a loving friend and kinswoman.”

Mastering her feelings with a strong effort, she bade me good night, and slowly walked back to the Hall.

I was overwhelmed with confusion and remorse. I had wondrously sported with the affections of one of the gentlest and noblest of human beings, which a single hint, dropped as if accidentally, of a previous passion might have prevented.

Between Catherine and me, no words of love had been exchanged. She might be the love of another—might be a wife, for anything I knew to the contrary. I had neither seen nor heard anything regarding her for some months. I had sacrificed the peace and happiness of the generous, confiding Margaretta, to an idol, which might only exist in my own heated imagination.

Bitterly I cursed my folly when repentance came too late.

I was too much vexed and annoyed with myself to return to the Hall, and I rambled on until I found myself opposite to the fishing-house.

The river lay before me gleaming in the setting sun. Everything around was calm, peaceful and beautiful, but there was no rest, no peace in my heart.

As I approached the rustic bridge from which the wretched Alice had attempted suicide, I perceived a human figure seated on a stone on the bank of the river, in a crouching, listless attitude. This excited my curiosity, and catching at anything that might divert my thoughts from the unpleasant train in which they had been running for the last hour, I struck off the path I had been pursuing, which led directly to the public road, and soon reached the object in question.

Wrapped in an old grey mantle, with a red silk handkerchief tied over her head, her chin resting between her long bony hands, and her eyes shut, or bent intently on the ground, I recognized, with a shudder of aversion and disgust, the remarkable face of Dinah North.

Her grizzled locks had partly escaped from their bandage, and fell in thin, straggling lines over her low, wrinkled forehead. The fire of her deep-seated dark eyes was hidden beneath their drooping lids, and she was muttering to herself some strange, unintelligible gibberish.

She did not notice me until I purposely placed myself between her and the river that rolled silently and swiftly at her feet.

Without manifesting the least surprise at the uncereemonious manner in which I had disturbed her reverie, she slowly raised her witch-like countenance, and for a few seconds surveyed me with a sullen stare.

As if satisfied with my identity, she accosted me with the

same sarcastic writhing of the upper lip, which on our first interview had given me the key to her character.

"You, too, are a Moncton, and like the rest of that accursed race, are fair and false. Your dark eyes all fire—your heart as cold as ice. Proud as Lucifer—inexorable as the grave—woe to those who put any trust in a Moncton; they are certain of disappointment—sure to be betrayed. Pass by, young sir, I have no doubt that you are like the rest of your kin. I wish them no good, but evil, so you had better not cross my path."

"Your hatred, Mrs. North, is more to be coveted than your friendship. To incur the first, augurs some good in the person thus honored; to possess the last, would render us worthy of your curse."

"Ha, ha!" returned the grim fiend, laughing ironically, "your knowledge of the world has given you a bitter spirit. I wish you joy of the acquisition. Time will increase its acrimony. But I like your bluntness of speech, and prophesy from it that you are born to overcome the malignity of your enemies."

"And you," and I fixed my eyes steadily on her hideous countenance, "for what end were you born?"

"To be the curse of others," she answered, with a grim smile, which displayed those glittering white teeth within her faded, fleshless lips, that looked like a row of pearls in a Death's head; and there flashed from her swart eye a red light which made the blood curdle in my veins, as she continued in the same taunting strain.

"I have been of use, too, in my day and generation. I have won many souls, but not for heaven. I have served my master well, and shall doubtless receive my reward."

"This is madness, Dinah North, but without excuse. It is the madness of guilt."

"It is a quality I possess in common with my kind. The

world is made up of madmen and fools. It is better to belong to the first than to the latter class—to rule, than to be ruled. Between those two parties the whole earth is divided. Knowledge is power, whether it be the knowledge of evil or of good. I heard that sentence when a girl ; it never left my mind, and I have acted upon it through life.”

“It must have been upon the knowledge of evil—as your deeds can too well testify.”

“You have guessed right, young sir. By it, the devil lost heaven, but he gained hell. By it, tyrants rule, and mean men become rich ; virtue is overcome, and vice triumphs.”

“And what have you gained by it?”

“Much ; it has given me an influence in the world, which without it, never could have belonged to one of my degree. By it, I have swayed the destinies of those whom fortune had apparently placed beyond my reach. It has given me, Geoffrey Moncton, power over thee and thine, and at this very moment, the key of your future fortune is in my keeping.”

“And your life in mine, vain boaster. The hour is at hand which shall make even a hardened sinner like you acknowledge that there is a righteous God that judges in the earth.

“I ask you not for the secret which you say that you possess, and which, after all, may be a falsehood, in unison with the deceit and treachery that has marked your whole life—a lie, invented to extort money, or to gratify the spite of your malignant heart. The power that punishes the guilty and watches over the innocent, will vindicate the good name of which a wretch like you would fain deprive me.”

“Don’t be too sure of *celestial* aid,” she said with a sneer, “but make to yourself friends of the mammon of unrighteousness, as the wisest policy. Flatter from your Uncle Robert the ill-gotten wealth that his dastardly son, Theophilus, shall never possess.”

"This advice comes well from the sordid woman who sold her innocent grandchild to this same Theophilus, in the hope that she might enjoy the rank and fortune that belonged to the good and noble, and by this unholy act, sacrificed the peace—perhaps the eternal happiness of that most wretched creature."

The countenance of the old woman grew dark—dark as night. She fixed upon me a wild, inquiring gaze.

"You speak of Alice. In the name of God, tell me what has become of her !"

"Upon one condition," I said, laying my hand upon her shoulder and whispering the words into her ear. "Tell me what has become of Philip Mornington."

"Ha !" said the old woman, trying to shake off my grasp—"what do you know of him ?"

"Enough to hang you—something that the grave in the dark shrubbery can reveal."

"Has she told you *that*. The fool—the idiot ; in so doing she betrayed herself."

"*She* told me nothing. The eye that witnessed the deed confided to me that secret. The earth will not conceal the stain of blood. Did you never hear that fact before ? Is not my secret as good as yours, Dinah North ? Are you willing to make an exchange ?"

The old woman crouched herself together, and buried her face between her knees. Her hands opened and shut with a convulsive motion, as if they retained something in their grasp with which she was unwilling to part. At length, raising her head, she said in a decided manner :

"The law has lost in you a *worthy* member ; but I accept the terms. Come to me to-morrow at nine o'clock."

"To-night, or never !"

"Don't try to force or bully me into compliance, young man. At my own time, and in my own way, alone, will I gratify your curiosity."

“Well, be it so—to-morrow. I will meet you at the Lodge at nine to-morrow.”

She rose from her seat ; regarded me with the same withering glance and cutting smile, and gliding past me, vanished among the trees.

Exulting in my success, I exclaimed—“Thank God I shall know all to-morrow !”

CHAPTER XXV.

AN EXPLANATION—DEPARTURE—DISAPPOINTMENT.

I WAS so elated with the unexpected result of my meeting with Dinah North, that it was not until I missed the fairy figure of my sweet cousin at the supper table, that my mind reverted to the conversation that had passed between us in the park.

"Where is Miss Moncton?" I asked of Sir Alexander, in a tone and manner which would have betrayed the agitation I felt, to a stranger.

"She is not well, Geoffrey, has a bad headache, or is nervous, I forget which, and begged to be excused joining us to-night. These little female complaints are never dangerous, so don't look alarmed. My girl is no philosopher, and this double parting affects her spirits. She will be all right again when you come back."

I sighed involuntarily. The provoking old man burst into a hearty laugh.

"I am likely to have a dull companion to-night, Geoff. Hang it, boy, don't look so dismal. Do you think that you are the only man that ever was in love? I was a young man once. Ay, and a fine young man too, or the world and the ladies told great stories, but I never could enact the part of a sentimental lover. Fill your glass and drive away care. Success to your journey. Our journeys, I might have said—and a happy meeting with little Madge."

I longed to tell Sir Alexander the truth, and repeat to him my conversation with his daughter. But I could not bear to

mortify his pride, for I could not fail to perceive that he contemplated a union between us with pleasure, and was doing his best to encourage me to make a declaration of my attachment to Margaret.

I was placed in a most unfortunate predicament, and in order to drown my own miserable feelings, I drank more wine than usual, and gaining an artificial flow of spirits, amused my generous patron with a number of facetious stories and anecdotes, until the night was far advanced, and we both retired to rest.

My brain was too much heated with the wine I had drank, to sleep, and after making several ineffectual efforts, I rose from my bed—relighted my candle, and dressing myself, sat down to my desk, and wrote a long letter to Margareta, in which I informed her of my first meeting with Catherine Lee ; the interest which her beauty had created in my heart—the romantic attachment I had formed for her, and which, hopeless as it was, I could not wholly overcome. I assured Margareta, that I felt for herself, the greatest affection and esteem—that but for the remembrance of this first passion, the idea that she loved me would have made me the happiest of men. That if she would accept the heart I had to offer, divided as I felt it was with another, and my legitimacy could be established, my whole life should be devoted to her alone.

I ended this long candid confession, by relating verbatim my interview with Dinah North, and begged if possible, that I might exchange a few words with her before leaving the Hall.

I felt greatly relieved by thus unburdening my mind. I had told the honest truth, without fear, and without disguise ; and I knew that she, who was the mirror of truth, would value my sincerity as it deserved.

The sun was scarcely up when I dispatched my letter, and before the early breakfast, that had been ordered previous to our departure, was ready, I received the following answer—

"MY DEAR COUSIN GEOFFREY :

Your invaluable letter has greatly raised you in my esteem ; I cannot sufficiently admire the conscientious scruples which dictated it—and though we cannot meet as lovers, after the candid revelation you have confided to me, we may still remain, what all near relatives ought to be, firm and faithful friends.

"To you I can attach no blame whatever, and I feel proud that my affections, though fixed upon an object beyond their reach, were bestowed upon one so every way worthy of them.

"Let us therefore forget our private sorrows, and drown unavailing regrets in doing all we can to serve Philip and his sister. Farewell—with sincere prayers for the successful issue of your journey, believe me, now and ever, your faithful and loving friend,

MARGARETTA."

"What a noble creature she is," I said, as I pressed the letter to my lips ; "I am indeed unworthy of such a treasure."

Yet I felt happy at that moment—happy, that she knew all—that I had not deceived her, but had performed an act of painful duty, though by so doing I had perhaps destroyed the brilliancy of my future prospects in life.

With mingled feelings of gratitude and pleasure I met my dear cousin at the breakfast table. Her countenance, although paler than usual, wore a tranquil, and even cheerful expression.

"Why, Madge, my darling," cried the baronet, kissing her pale cheek, "you are determined to see the last of us—is your early rising in honor of Geoffrey or me?"

"Of both," she said, with her sweetest smile. "I never employ a proxy to bid farewell to my friends."

Several efforts were made at conversation during the meal, which proved eminently unsuccessful. The hour of parting came. The baronet was safely stowed away into his carriage ; the noble horses plunged forward, and the glittering equipage was soon lost among the trees. I lingered a moment behind.

"Dear Margaret, we part friends."

"The best of friends."

"God bless you, dearest and noblest of women," I said, faintly; for my lips quivered with emotion; I could scarcely articulate a word; "you have removed a load of anxiety from my heart. To have lost your friendship would have been a severer trial to me, than the loss of name or fortune."

"I believe you, Geoffrey. But never allude again to this painful subject, if you value my health and peace. We understand each other. If God wills it so, we may both be happy, though the attainment of it may not exactly coincide with our present wishes. Adieu, dear cousin. You have my heart-felt prayers for your success."

She raised her tearful eyes to mine. The next moment she was in my arms, pressed closely against my breast—a stifled sob—one kiss—one long lingering embrace—a heavy melancholy deep-drawn sigh, and she was gone.

I mounted my horse and rode quickly forward; my thoughts so occupied with Margaretta and that sad parting, that I nearly forgot the promised interview with Dinah North, until my proximity to the lodge brought it vividly to my remembrance.

Fastening my horse to the rustic railing that fronted the cottage, I crossed the pretty little flower garden, and knocked rather impatiently at the door. My summons, though given in loud and authoritative tones, remained unanswered.

Again and again I applied my hand to the rusty iron knocker; it awoke no response from the tenant of the house. She must be dead or out, I said, losing all patience; "I will stay here no longer," and lifting the latch, I very unceremoniously entered the cottage. All was silent within. The embers on the hearth were dead, and the culinary vessels were scattered over the floor. The white muslin curtains which shaded the rose-bound windows were undrawn. The door which led into the bed-room was open,

the bed made and the room untenanted. It was evident that the old woman was not there. I called aloud :

"Dinah, Dinah North ! Is any one within ?"

No answer.

I proceeded to explore the rest of the dwelling. In the front room or parlor, the contents of a small chest of drawers had been emptied out on the floor, and some few articles of little value were strewn about. It was an evident fact, that the bird was flown ; and all my high-raised expectations resolved themselves into air.

Whilst cursing the crafty old woman bitterly in my heart, my eye glanced upon a slip of paper lying upon a side table. I hastily snatched it up and read the following words traced in a bold hand :

"Geoffrey Moncton, when next we meet, your secret and mine will be of equal value.

"DINAH NORTH."

I was bitterly disappointed, and crushing the paper in my hand, I flung it as far from me as I could.

"Curse the old fiend. We shall yet meet. I will trace her to the utmost bounds of earth to bring her to justice."

I left the house in a terrible ill humor, and re-mounting my horse, pursued my journey to Derbyshire.

It was late on the evening of the second day, when I reached the little village, over which my grandfather Rivers had exercised the pastoral office for nearly fifty years. The good man had been gathered to his fathers a few months before I was born. It was not without feeling a considerable degree of interest that I rode past the humble church, surrounded by its lofty screen of elms, and glanced at the green sward, beneath whose daisy-sprinkled carpet, the

Rude forefathers of the village slept."

The rain had fallen softly but perseveringly the whole day,

and I was wet, hungry, and tired—and the neat little inn, with its gay sign-board, white-washed walls and green window-blinds, was hailed as the most welcome and picturesque object which had met my sight for the last three hours.

“Stay all night, sir?” said the brisk lad, from whose helmet-like leathern cap the water trickled in the most obtrusively impertinent manner over his rosy, freckled face, as he ran forward to hold my horse. “Good accommodation for man and beast—capital beds, sir.”

“Yes, yes,” I replied, somewhat impatiently, as I threw him the reins and entered the brick passage of the Inn. “Where is the master of the house?”

“No master, sir,” returned the officious lad, following me. “The master be a missus, sir. Here she come.”

“What’s your pleasure?” said a very pretty woman, about thirty years of age, advancing from an inner-room. She was dressed in widow’s weeds, which became her very fair face amazingly, and led by the hand a rosy, curly-headed urchin, whose claims to general admiration were by no means contemptible. The mother and her lovely boy would have made a charming picture; and I forgot, while contemplating the originals, that I was wet and hungry.

With the quickness of her sex, Mrs. Archer perceived that she had made a favorable impression on her new guest. And putting back the luxuriant curls from the white brow of her boy, she remarked, with a sigh:

“He’s young to be an orphan—poor child!”

“He is, indeed,” I replied, kissing the little fellow, as I spoke; “and his mother far too young and pretty to remain long a widow.”

“La, sir; you don’t say so,” said Mrs. Archer, smiling and blushing most becomingly. “And you standing all this while in the drafty, cold passage in your wet clothes. You can have a private room and a fire, sir.”

"And a good supper, I hope," said I laughing. "I have ridden fifty miles to-day, and I feel desperately hungry."

"You shall have the best the house affords. Pray, walk this way."

I followed my conductress into a neat little room. A fat country girl was on her knees before the grate striving to kindle the fire ; but the wood was wet, and in spite of the girl's exertions, who was supplying with her mouth the want of a pair of bellows, the fire refused to burn.

"It's of no manner of use—no it isn't," said the girl. "I may blow till I bust, an' it won't kindle."

"Try again, Betty," said her mistress, encouragingly. "You were always a first-rate hand at raising the fire."

"But the wood warn't wet," returned the fat girl, discontentedly. "I can't make it burn when it won't."

And getting up from her fat knees she retreated, scowling alternately at me and the refractory fire.

The room looked cold and comfortless. The heavy rain dashed drearily against the narrow window panes ; and I inquired if I could not dry my wet clothes and eat my supper by the kitchen fire.

"Oh, yes. If such a gentleman as you will condescend to enter my humble kitchen," was the reply.

I did condescend—heaven only knows how gladly—and soon found myself comfortably seated before an excellent fire, in company with a stout, red-faced, jolly old farmer, and a thin, weazel-faced, undersized individual, dressed in a threadbare suit of pepper and salt, who kept his hat on, and wore it on one side with a knowing swagger, talked big, and gave himself a thousand consequential airs.

This person I discovered to be the barber and great politician of the village. Who talked continually of King George and the royal family ; of the king's ministers ; the war in

Rooshia, the burning of Moscow, and the destruction of that monster Bonyparty.

The farmer, who was no scholar, and looked upon him of the strop and razor as a perfect oracle, was treating him to a pot of ale, for the sake of the news. The barber paying twopence a week for the sight of a second-hand newspaper.

Mrs. Archer went softly up to the maker of perukes, and whispered something in his ear. He answered with a knowing nod, and without moving, stared me full in the face.

"Not an inch will I budge, Mrs. Archer. One man's money is as good as another man's money. No offence to the gemmen, 'A man's a man for a' that.' That's what I call real independence, neighbor Bullock."

And his long, lean fingers descended upon the fat knee of the farmer with a whack that rang through the kitchen.

"Dence take you, Sheldrake. I wish you'd just show it in some other way," said the farmer, rubbing his knee. "Why, man, your fingers are as long and as lean as a crow's claws, and as hard as your own block, and sting like whip-cord. One would think that you had dabbled long enough in oil and pomatum, and such like messes, to make them as white as a lady's hand, and as soft as your own head."

"They have been made tough by handling such hard num-skulls as yours, neighbor Bullock. That chin of yours, with its three days' growth of bristles, would be a fortune to a brick-layer, whilst it spoils my best razors, and never puts a penny into the pocket of the poor operator."

"*Operator*," repeated the farmer, with a broad, quizzical grin, "is that your new-fangled name for a shaver? It's a pity you didn't put it on the board with the farago of nonsense, by which you hope to attract the attention of all the fool bodies in the town."

"Don't speak disrespectfully of my sign, sir," quoth the little

barber, waxing wroth. "My sign is an excellent sign—the admiration of the whole village ; and let me tell you that it is not in *spite* and *envy* to put it down—let spite and envy try as hard as they can. The genius that suggested that sign is not destined to go unrewarded."

"Ha, ha, ha !" roared the chewer of bacon.

"Mrs. Archer," said the offended shaver, turning to the pretty widow with an air of wounded dignity truly comic, "did you ever before hear a Bullock laugh like a hog?"

"Dang it, man, such conceit would make a cow caper a horn-pipe, or a Shelled Drake crow like a cock."

"I beg you, *Mister* Bullock, to take no liberties with my name—especially in the presence of the fair sex," bowing gracefully to Mrs. Archer, who was leaning upon the back of my chair, half suffocated with suppressed laughter.

"What are you quarrelling about, Sheldrake?" said the good-natured widow. "Bullock, can't you let his sign alone? It is something new, I hear—something in praise of the ladies."

"I was always devoted to the ladies," said the barber, "having expended the best years of my life in their service."

"Well, well, if so be that you call that powetry over your door a compliment to the women folk, I'll be shot!" said the farmer. "Now, sir," turning to me, "you are a stranger, and therefore unprejudiced ; you shall be judge. Come, barber, repeat your verses, and hear what the gemmen says of them."

"With all my heart ;" and flinging his shoulders back and stretching forth his right arm, the barber repeated in a loud theatrical tone.

"I, William Sheldrake, shave for a penny,
Ladies and gentlemen—there can't come too many—
With heads and beards—I meant to say
Those who've got none may keep away."

A hearty burst of laughter from us all greatly disconcerted the barber, who looked as ruefully at us as a stuck pig.

"You hairy monster," quoth Mrs. Archer, "what do you mean by shaving the ladies? You deserve to be ducked to death in a tub of dirty suds. Beards forsooth," and she patted, with evident complacency, her round, white, dimpled chin; "who ever saw a woman with a beard? Did you take us all for Lapland witches? I wonder what our pretty young lady up at Elm Grove would say to your absurd verses."

"That is no secret to me, Mrs. Archer. I do know what she thinks of it. Miss Lee is a young lady of taste, and knows how to appreciate good poetry, which is more than some folks, not a hundred miles off, does.

"She rode past my shop yesterday on horseback, and I saw her point to my sign with her riding-whip, and heard her say to the London chap that is allers with her,

" 'Is not that *capital* ?

"And he says, '*Capital* ! If that does not draw custom to the shop, nothing will.' So now, neighbor Bullock, you may just leave off sneering at my sign."

"I did not think Miss Lee had been such a fool," said Bullock, "but there's no accounting for taste."

"Who is the gentleman that is staying at the Elms just now?" asked Mrs. Archer. "Do you know his name?"

"I've heard," said Suds, "but really I quite forget. It either begins with an M or an N."

"That's a wide landmark to sail by, Sheldrake. You might as well have added a P or a Q."

"Stop," said the barber, "I can give you a clue to it. Do you remember, Bullock, the name of the fine sporting gemman that ran off with Parson Rivers's daughter? I was a boy then, serving my time with Sam Strap."

I started from the contemplation of the fine well-grilled

beef-steak that Mrs. Archer was dishing for my especial benefit.

"Well," said Sheldrake, "he is either a son or a neffy of his, and has the same name."

"The deuce he is! That was Moncton if I mistake not. "Yes, yes, Moncton was the name. I well remember it, for it was the means of our losing our good old pastor."

"How was that?" said I, trying to look indifferent.

"Why, sir, do you see. Mr. Rivers had been many years in the parish. He married my father and mother, and baptized me, when a babby. He did more than that. He married me to my old woman, when I was a man—but that was the worst job he ever done.

"Well, sir, as I was telling you. He was a good man and a a Christain. But he had one little weakness. We have all our faults sir. He loved his pretty daughter too well—wise men will sometimes play the fool, and 'tis a bad thing to make too much of woman-kind. Like servants they grow saucy upon it. They always gets the advantage, any how, and our old parson did pet and spoil Miss Ellen, to her heart's content.

"There was some excuse too for him, for he was an old man and a widower. He had lost his wife and a large family. Parsons always have large families. My wife do say, that 'tis because they have nothing else to do. But I'se very sure, that I should find preaching and sermon work hard enough."

"Lord, man, what a roundabout way you have of telling a story," cried Suds, who was impatient to hear his own voice again. "Get on a little quicker. Don't you see, the gemmen's steak's a-getting cold—and he can't eat and listen to you at the same time, an art I learnt long ago."

"Mind your own business, Sheldrake," said the farmer, "I never trouble my head with the nonsense that is always frothing out of your mouth."

"Well, sir," turning again to me, "as I was saying ; his wife and family had all died in the consumption, which made him so afraid of losing Miss Ellen, that he denied her nothing, and truly she was as pretty a piece of God's workmanship as ever you saw—and very sweet-tempered and gentle, which beauties seldom are. I had the misfortune to marry a pretty woman, and I knows it to my cost. But I need not trouble you with my missus. It's bad enough to be troubled with her myself.

"So, sir—as I was telling you. There came a mighty fine gentleman down from London, to stay at the Elm Grove, with my old landlord Squire Lee, who's dead and gone."

"This Squire Lee, was the son of old Squire Lee."

"I dare say, Bullock, the gemman does not care a farthing whose son he was," cried the impatient barber. "You are so fond of genealogies, that it's a pity you don't begin with the last squire, and end with, which was the son of Seth, which was the son of Adam, &c."

These interruptions were very annoying, as I was on the tenter hooks to get out of the mountain of flesh, the head and tail of the story, he found such difficulty in bringing forth.

"Pray go on with your story, friend," I said, very demurely, for fear of hurrying him into becoming more discursive. "I feel quite interested."

"Well, sir, this young man came to stay at the Grove, during the shooting season ; and he sees Miss Ellen at church, and falls desperately in love with her. This was all very natural. I was a youngster myself once, and a smart active chap, although I be clumsy enough now, and I remember feeling rather queerish, whenever I cast a sheep's eye into the parson's pew."

"But the young lady and her lover?"—for I perceived that he was trotting off at full gallop in another direction—"how did they come on?"

"Oh, ay. As young people generally do in such cases. From

exchanging looks, they came to exchanging letters, and then words. Stolen meetings, and presents of hearts cut out of turnips, with a skewer put through them, to show the desperation of the case. That was the way at least, that I went a courting my Martha, and it took amazingly."

"Hang you, and your Martha!" thought I, as I turned helplessly to the beef-steak, but I felt too much excited to do it the least justice.

After deliberately knocking the ashes from his pipe, and taking a long draught of ale from the pewter pot beside him, the old farmer went on of his own accord.

"I s'pose the young man told Miss Ellen that he could not live without her. We all tell 'em so, but we never dies a bit the sooner, for all that—and the pretty Miss told him to speak to her father, and he did speak, and to his surprise, old parson did not like it at all, and did not give him a very civil answer; and turned the young chap out of the house. He said, that he did not approve of sporting characters for sons-in-law, and Miss Ellen should never get his consent to marry him. But as I told you before, sir. The women-folk will have their own way, especially when there is a sweet-heart or a new bonnet in the case, and the young lady gave him her own consent, and they took French leave and went off without saying a word to nobody.

"Next morning old parson was running about the village, asking everybody if they had seen his child, the tears running over his thin face, and he raving like a man out of his head."

"And were the young people ever married?" and in spite of myself I felt the color flush my face to crimson.

"I never heard to the contrary. But it was not right of her to vex the poor old man; he took it so to heart, that it quite broke his spirit, and he lived but a very few months after she left him."

"His death was a great loss to the neighborhood. We never had a parson that could hold a candle to him since. He was a father to the poor, and it was a thousand pities to see the good old man pining and drooping from day to day, and fretting himself after the spoilt gall who forsook him in his old age."

"You are too hard upon the young lady," said Suds,— "it was but human natur after all, and small blame in her to prefer a handsome young husband to an old snuffy superannuated parson."

"Did she ever return to ——?"

"She came to see her father in his dying illness, but too late to receive his forgiveness, for he died while her step was on the stairs. His last words—'Thank God Ellen is come, I shall see her before I die.' But he did not, for he expired directly the words were out of his mouth. She and her husband followed the old man to his grave, and baring her grief, I never saw a handsomer couple."

"Do you know," I said hesitatingly, the church in which they were married?"

"I never heard sir, not feeling curious to ask, as it did not concern me, but Mrs. Hepburn up at the grove, knows, she was Miss Lee then, and she and old parson's daughter went to school together, and were fast friends."

"Thank you," I replied, carelessly, drawing my chair from the table, "you have satisfied my curiosity."

Though outwardly calm, my heart was beating violently.— Could it be true, that I was in the immediate vicinity of Catherine and her aunt, and that the latter might be acquainted with the facts so important for me to procure.

The hopes and fears which this conversation had produced had the effect of destroying my appetite. It was in vain that the pretty widow tempted me with a number of delicacies in the shape of sweet home-made bread, delicious fresh butter, and

humming ale, the power of mental excitement overpowered the mere gratification of the senses.

“ Before I retired for the night, I had the mortification of seeing my loquacious companions doing ample justice to the savory supper, from which I had risen with indifference.

I sought the solitude of my chamber, undressed, and flung myself into bed. To sleep was out of the question. Catherine Lee, Margareta Moncton and my dear mother floated in a continual whirl through my heated brain. My mind was a perfect chaos of confused images and thoughts ; nor could I reflect calmly on one subject for two minutes together.

My head ached, my heart beat tumultuously, and in order to allay this feverish mental irritation, I took a large dose of laudanum, which produced the desired effect of lulling me into profound forgetfulness.

The day was far advanced when I shook off this heavy unwholesome slumber, but on endeavoring to rise, I felt so stupid and giddy, that I was fain to take a cup of coffee in bed. A tablespoonful of lime-juice administered by the white hand of Mrs. Archer, counteracted the unpleasant effects of the opiate.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ELM GROVE.

ON calmly reviewing the conversation of the past night, I determined to walk over to Elm Grove, and confide my situation to Mrs. Hepburn, who, as a friend of my mother's, might feel more interested in me, than she had done in Mr. Robert Moncton's poor dependent clerk.

I was so well pleased with this plan that I immediately put it into execution, and gave myself no time to alter my resolution, until I found myself waiting the appearance of the lady, in an elegant drawing-room, which commanded the most beautiful prospect of hill and dale, in that most beautiful and romantic of English counties.

Mrs. Hepburn was past the meridian of life. Her countenance was by no means handsome, but the expression was gentle and agreeable, and her whole appearance lady-like and prepossessing.

She had mingled a great deal in the world, which had given her such a perfect control over her features, that little could be read of the inward emotions of the mind, from the calm and almost immovable placidity of her face.

A slight look of surprise at the sight of a visitor so unexpected, and, in all probability, equally unwelcome, made me feel most keenly the awkwardness of the situation in which I was placed. The cold and courteous manner in which she asked to what cause she was indebted for the pleasure of a visit from

Mr. Geoffrey Moncton, did not tend to diminish my confusion.

I suffered my agitation so completely to master me, that for a few seconds I could find no words wherewith to frame the most commonplace answer.

Observing my distress, she begged me to take a seat, and placing herself on the opposite side of the table, she continued to regard me with the most provoking *nonchalance*.

Making a desperate effort to break the oppressive silence, I contrived at last to stammer out,

"I hope, madam, you will excuse the liberty I have taken by thus intruding myself upon your notice ; but business of a very delicate and distressing nature induced me to apply to you, as the only person at all likely to befriend me in my present difficulty."

Her look of surprise increased ; nor do I wonder at it, considering the ambiguity of my speech. What must she have thought ? Nothing very favorable to me, I am sure. I could have bitten my tongue off for my want of tact, but the blunder was out, and she answered with some asperity.

That we were almost strangers to each other, and that she could not imagine in what way she could serve me, without my request was a pecuniary one, in which case, she owed me a debt of gratitude which she would gladly repay. That she had heard, with sorrow, from Mr. Theophilus Moncton, the manner in which I had been expelled from his father's office. That she bitterly lamented that she or her niece should have directly or indirectly have been the cause of my disgrace. She had been told, however, that the cause of Mr. Moncton's displeasure originated in my own rash conduct, and she feared that no application from her in my behalf, would be likely to effect a reconciliation between me and my uncle.

The color burnt upon my cheek, and I answered with some warmth :

"God forbid, that I should ever seek it at his hands ! It is neither to solicit charity nor to complain to you, Mrs. Hepburn, of my past ill-treatment, that I sought an interview with you this morning. But—but"—and my voice faltered, and my eyes sought the ground, "I was told last night that you were the intimate friend of my mother."

"And who, sir, was your mother?"

"Her name was Ellen Rivers."

"Good Heavens ! you the son of Ellen Rivers ;" and the calm face became intensely agitated. "You, Geoffrey Moncton, the child of my first and dearest friend. I was told you were the natural son of her husband."

"But was he her husband?" and I almost gasped for breath.

"Who dares to doubt it?"

"This same honorable uncle of mine. He positively affirms that my mother was never lawfully the wife of Edward Moncton. He has branded the names of my parents with infamy, and destroyed every document which could prove my legitimacy. The only advantage which I derived from a niggardly destiny—my good name—has been wrenched from me by this cold-blooded, dastardly villain !"

I was too much excited to speak with moderation ; I trembled with passion.

"Be calm, Mr. Geoffrey," said Mrs. Hepburn, speaking in a natural and affectionate tone. "Let us go at length into the matter, and if I can in any way assist you, I will do so most cheerfully ; although I must confess, that as matters stand between the families just now, it is rather an awkward piece of business. Your uncle, perhaps, never knew that I was acquainted with Miss Rivers, or felt any interest in her fate. These deep-seeing men often overreach themselves. But let me hear the tale you have to tell, and then I can better judge of its truth or falsehood."

Encouraged by the change in Mrs. Hepburn's tone and bear-

ing, I gave her a brief statement of the events of my life, up to the hour in which I came to an open rupture with my uncle ; and he basely destroyed my articles, and I found myself cast upon the world without the means of subsistence.

Mrs. Hepburn was greatly astonished at the narration, and often interrupted me to express her indignation.

“ And this is the man, that bears such a fair character to the world. The friend of the friendless, and the guardian of innocence. Geoffrey Moncton, you make me afraid of the world, of myself—of every one. But what are you doing for a living, and what brings you into Derbyshire ?”

“ I am living at present in the family of Sir Alexander Moncton, who has behaved in the most generous manner to his *poor relation*.”

“ You have in him a powerful protector.”

“ Yes, and I may add, without boasting, a sincere friend. It is at his expense, and on his instigation that I am here, in order to find out some clue by which I may trace the marriage of my dear mother, and establish a legitimate claim to the title and estates of Moncton, at the worthy Baronet’s demise, an event, which may God keep far distant ”—I added with fervor.

“ If I fail in this object, the property devolves to Robert Moncton and his son.”

“ I see it, I see it all—but I fear, Mr. Geoffrey, that your uncle has laid his plans too deeply for us to frustrate. I feel no doubts, as to your mother’s marriage, though I was not present when that event took place, but I can tell you the church in which the ceremony was performed. Your mother was just of age, and the consent of parents was unnecessary, as far as the legality of the marriage was concerned.”

“ God bless you !” I cried, taking the hand she extended to me, and pressing it heartily between my own. “ My mother’s son blesses you, for the kind sympathy you have expressed in

his welfare. You are my good angel, and have inspired me with a thousand new and pleasing hopes."

"These will not, however, prove your legitimacy my young friend," she said, with a smile—"so restrain your ardor for a more fortunate time. I have a letter from your mother, written the morning after her marriage, describing her feelings during the ceremony and the remorse that marred her happiness, for having disobeyed and abandoned her aged father. She mentions her old nurse, and her father's gardener, as being the only witnesses present, and remarks on the sexton giving her away, that it was a bad omen, that she felt superstitious about it, and that her husband laughed at her fears.

"The register of the marriage, you say, has been destroyed. The parties who witnessed it, are most likely gathered to their fathers. But the very circumstance of the register having been destroyed, and this letter of your mother's, will, I think, be greatly in your favor. At all events, the parish of —— is only a pleasant ride among the Derby hills; and you can examine the registers for a trifling donation to the clerk; and ascertain from him, whether Mr. Roche, the clergyman who then resided in the parish, or his sexton, are still living.

"I will now introduce you to my niece, who always speaks of you with interest, and refuses to believe the many things advanced by your cousin to your disadvantage."

"Just like Miss Lee. She is not one to listen to the slanders of an enemy, behind one's back. I heard in the village, that Mr. Theophilus was in this neighborhood, and a suitor of Miss Lee's."

"A mere village gossip. He is staying with Mr. Thurton, who lives in the pretty old-fashioned house, you passed on the hill, on your way hither, and is a frequent visitor here. Mr. Moncton is anxious to promote an alliance between his son and my niece. In birth and fortune, they are equals, and the match, in a worldly point of view, unexceptional."

“And Theophilus?”

“Is the most devoted of lovers.”

“Execrable villain! and his poor young wife dying at the Hall of a broken heart. Can such things be—and the vengeance of heaven sleep!”

“You don’t mean to insinuate that Mr. Theophilus Moncton is a married man.”

“I scorn insinuations, I speak of facts—which to his face, I dare him to deny.”

“My dear Kate!” cried Mrs. Hepburn sinking back in her chair. “I have combated for several weeks with what I considered an unreasonable prejudice on her part against this marriage. And this very morning I was congratulating myself on the possibility of getting her to receive Mr. Moncton’s suit more favorably. Ah, Mr. Geoffrey! doubly her preserver, your timely visit has saved the dear girl from unutterable misery.”

I then informed Mrs. Hepburn, of all the particulars of this unfortunate marriage. Of young Moncton’s desertion and barbarous treatment of his wife—of her attempted suicide, and the providential manner in which she had been rescued by me from the grave.

This painful interview, which had lasted several hours, was at length terminated by the entrance of Miss Lee and Theophilus, who had been absent riding with some friends.

They entered from the garden, and Mrs. Hepburn and I were so deeply engaged in conversation that we did not notice their approach until Catherine called out in a tone of alarm:—

“Mr. Geoffrey Moncton here, and my aunt in tears? What can have happened?”

“Yes, Kate, you will be glad to see an old friend,” said her aunt. “To you, Mr. Moncton,” turning to Theophilus, “he is the bearer of sad tidings.”

“Anything happened to my father?” said Theophilus, looking

towards me with an expression in his green eyes, of intense and hungry inquiry, which, for a moment, overcame his first glance of aversion and contempt.

I read the meaning of that look, and answered scorn for scorn.

"Of your father and *his* affairs I know nothing. The tie of kindred is broken between us. I wish that I knew as little of you and yours."

"What do you mean?" and his pale cheek flushed with crimson. "Is it to traduce my character, to insult me before ladies, that you dare to intrude yourself in my company? What brings you here? What message have you for me?"

"With you," I said, coldly, "I have no business, nor did I ever wish to see you again. My steps were guided here by that Providence which watches over the innocent, and avenges the wrongs of the injured. It is not my nature to stab even an enemy in the dark. What I have to say to you will be said openly and to your face."

"This is fine language," he said, bursting into a scornful laugh. "On what provincial theatre have you been studying, since you were expelled my father's office?"

"I have not yet learned to act the part of the hypocrite and betrayer, in the great drama of life. Or by lying and deceit to exalt myself upon the ruin of others."

"Go on, go on," he cried, "I perceive your drift. You are a better actor than you imagine yourself. Such accusations as you can bring against me, will redound more to my credit than praise from such lips."

"Theophilus Moncton," I replied, calmly, "I did not invade the sanctity of this roof in order to meet and quarrel with you. What I have to say to you I will communicate elsewhere."

"Here, sir, if you please—here to my face. I am no coward, and that you know of old. I am certain that you cannot name

anything to my disadvantage, but what I am able triumphantly to refute."

"Well—be it so then. I find you here a suitor for this lady's hand. Four days ago your wife attempted suicide, and was rescued from a watery grave by my arm."

"Liar ! 'tis false ! Do not listen, ladies, to this vile calumniator. He has a purpose of his own to serve, by traducing my character to my friends. Let him bring witnesses more worthy of credit than himself, before you condemn me."

"I condemn no one, Mr. Theophilus," said Mrs. Hepburn, gravely. "Sir Alexander Moncton is a person of credit, and your wife is at present under his protection. What can you say to this ?"

She spoke in vain. Theophilus left the room without deigning to reply. We looked in silence at each other.

Miss Lee was the first who spoke.

"He is convicted by his own conscience. I thought him cold and selfish, but never dreamed that he was a villain. And the poor young woman, his wife, what is her name ?"

"Alice Mornington."

A faint cry broke from the lips of Catherine. I caught her in my arms before she fell, and placed her in a chair ; she had fainted. Mrs. Hepburn rang the bell for one of her female attendants, and amid the bustle and confusion of removing Miss Lee to her own apartment, I took the opportunity of retiring from the scene.

"What new mystery does this involve ?" I said half aloud, as I sauntered down the thick avenue which led from the house to the high-road. "Why did the mention of that name produce such an effect upon Catherine ? She cannot be acquainted with the parties. Her agitation might be accidental. 'Tis strange—very strange"—

"Stop !" cried a loud voice near me ; and pale and haggard,

his hands fiercely clenched, and his eyes starting from his head, Theophilus confronted me.

"Geoffrey, this meeting must be our last."

"With all my heart ;" and folding my arms I looked him steadfastly in the face.

Never shall I forget the expression of that countenance, transformed as it was with furious passion ; livid, convulsed ; every feature swollen and quivering with malice and despair. It was dreadful to contemplate—scarcely human.

How often since has it haunted me in dreams.

The desire of revenge had overcome his usual caution. In the mood he was then in, his puny figure would have been a match for a giant.

"I seek no explanation of your conduct," he said ; "we hate each other ;" he gnashed his teeth as he spoke. "I have ruined you, and you have done your best to return the compliment. But you shall not triumph in my disgrace. If we fall it shall be together."

He sprang upon me unawares. He wound his thin sinewy arms around me. I was taken by surprise, and before I could raise my arm to defend myself from his ferocious attack, I was thrown heavily to the ground. The last thing that I can distinctly recollect was his thin bony fingers grasping my throat.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MY NURSE—AND WHO SHE WAS

THE night was far advanced when I recovered my senses. The room I occupied was large and spacious ; the bed on which I was lying such as wealth supplies to her most luxurious children. One watch-light with shaded rays, scarcely illuminated a small portion of the ample chamber, leaving the remote corners in intense shade.

A female figure, in a long, loose, white wrapping-gown, was seated at the table reading. Her back was towards me, and my head was too heavy and my eyes too dim to recognize the person of the stranger.

I strove to lift my head from the pillow ; the effort wrung from my lips a moan of pain. This brought the lady instantly to my side.

It was Mrs. Hepburn's face, but it faded from my sight like the faces that look upon us in dreams. Recollection and sight failed me—I remember nothing more.

Many days passed unconsciously over me. Nearly three weeks elapsed before I was able to bear the light, or ask an explanation of the past.

Mrs. Hepburn and Miss Lee were my constant attendants, and a middle-aged, respectable man in livery, who slept in my apartment, and rendered me the most kind and essential services. Dan Simpson was an old servant of the family. Had been born on the estate, and lived for thirty years under that roof. He

was a worthy, pious man, and during my long, tedious illness we contracted a mutual friendship which lasted to the close of his life. Had it not been for the care and attention of those excellent women and honest Dan, I might never have lived to be the chronicler of these adventures.

As I recovered strength, Simpson informed me that the game-keeper had witnessed from behind the hedge my encounter with Theophilus, and prevented further mischief by bursting suddenly upon my adversary, who had the dastardly meanness to give me several blows after I was insensible.

Theophilus left his victim with savage reluctance. The game-keeper, thought at first, that I was dead, and he told him that he had better be off, or he would inform against him, and have him convicted for murder. This hint was enough, and Theophilus lost no time in quitting the neighborhood.

I had fallen with the back of my head against the trunk of a large elm tree, which had caused concussion of the brain.

"You must be quite still, sir, and talk as little as possible, or 'twill be bad for you," said Simpson. "An the ladies must come near you as seldom as they can. We may manage to keep you silent, sir, but I'll be dashed, if it be possible to keep women's tongues from wagging. They will talk—no matter the danger to themselves or others ; an' 'tis 'most impossible for a man not to listen to them. They be so good and pretty. I'd advise you, Master Geoffrey, to shut your eyes, when our young lady comes in with the mistress to see you, an' then you'll no be tempted to open your ears."

There was a good deal of wholesome truth in honest Dan's advice, but I lacked the resolution to adopt it. My eyes and ears were always wide open when my fair nurse and her aunt approached my bed side.

It was delightful to me, to listen to the soft tones of Kate Lee's musical voice, when her sweet fair face was bending over

me, and she inquired in such an earnest and tender manner, how I was, and how I had passed the night?"

"Always the better for seeing and hearing you, charming Kate, I would have answered had I dared."

One afternoon, Kate was absent, and the dear old lady, her good aunt came to sit with me, and read to me while she was away. It was always good pious books she read, and I tried to feel interested; but they were dull, and if they failed to convert me, they never failed in putting me to sleep. Knowing the result, I always listened patiently, and in less than half an hour was certain to obtain my reward.

"I have no doubt, that the soporific quality of these sermons, by quieting my mind and producing wholesome repose, did more to enhance my recovery, than all the lotions and medicines administered by the family physician—who was another worthy but exceedingly prosy individual."

It so happened that this afternoon my kind old friend was inclined for a chat. She sat down near my bed, and after feeling my pulse, and telling me that I was going on nicely—she began to talk over my late misadventure.

"It is a mercy that your life was spared, Geoffrey. Who could have imagined that your cousin, with his smooth courteous manners and silken voice was such a ruffian."

"The snake is beautiful and graceful," said I, "yet the venom it conceals produces death. Theophilus has many qualities in common with the reptile. Smooth, insidious, and deadly. He always strikes to kill."

His encounter with you, Geoffrey, has removed every doubt from our minds, as to his real character and the truth of your statements. I cannot think without a shudder, of the bare possibility of my amiable Kate becoming the wife of such a villain."

"Could Miss Lee really entertain the least regard for such a man," I cried, indignant at the bare supposition.

"Hush, Geoffrey. You must not talk above a whisper. You know Dr. Lake has forbidden you to do that."

"Kate never loved Theophilus. She might, however, have yielded to my earnest importunities for her to become his wife. Mr. Moncton is her guardian, and some difficulties attend the settlement of her property, which this union, would in all probability have removed. You know the manner in which lawyers cut out work for themselves, Mr. Moncton. I have no doubt, it is the only real obstacle in the way."

"More than probable," whispered I, for I wanted the old lady to go on talking about Kate; "but, dear Mrs. Hepburn, I have a perfect horror of these marriages without affection; they seldom turn out well. Poor as I am I would never sacrifice the happiness of a whole life by contracting such a marriage."

"Young people always think so, but a few years produce a great change in their sentiments. I am always sorry when I hear of a young man or woman being desperately in love, for it generally ends in disappointment. A heavy trial of this kind—a most unfortunate engagement in early youth, has rendered poor Catharine indifferent to the voice of love."

I felt humbled and mortified by this speech. I turned upon my pillow to conceal my face from my kind nurse. Good heavens! Could it be true, that I had only loved the phantom of a dream—had followed for so many weary months a creature of imagination—a woman who had no heart to bestow upon her humble worshipper?

I had flattered myself that I was not indifferent to Miss Lee: had even dared to hope that she loved me.

What visions of future happiness in store for me, had these presumptuous hopes foretold. What stately castles had I not erected upon this sandy foundation, which I was now doomed to see perish, as it were within my grasp?

My bosom heaved, and my eyes became dim, but I proudly struggled with my feelings, and turning to Mrs. Hepburn, I

inquired with apparent calmness, "If any letters had arrived for me?" She said she did not know, but would send to the post-office and inquire.

I then, by mere chance, remembered the name that Sir Alexander had bestowed upon me, and told Simpson, who had just then entered, to ask for letters for Mr. Tremain.

I felt restless and unhappy, and feigned sleep, in order to be left alone—and when alone, if a few tears did come to my relief to cool the fever in my heart and brain, the reader who has ever loved will excuse the weakness.

I could not forgive my charming Kate, for having loved another, when I felt that she ought to have loved me. Had I not saved her life at the risk of my own—had I not been true to her at the sacrifice of my best interests, and slighted the pure devoted affection of Margaretta Moncton, for the love of one who loved me not—who never had loved me, though I had worshipped her image in the innermost shrine of my heart? Alas! for poor human nature: this severe trial was more than my philosophy could bear.

From these painful and mortifying reflections I was aroused by the light step of the beautiful delinquent, who, radiant in youth and loveliness, entered the room.

I glanced at her from under my half-closed eyelids. I regarded her as a fallen angel. She had dared to love another, and half her beauty had vanished.

She came to my bed-side, and in accents of the tenderest concern, inquired after my health.

"What have you been doing, Geoffrey—not talking too much I hope? You look ill and feverish. See, I have brought you a present—a nosegay of wild flowers, gathered in the woods. Are they not beautiful?"

To look into her sweet face, and entertain other feelings than those of respect and admiration, was impossible. I took the

flowers from the delicate white hand that proferred them, and tried to thank her. My lips quivered. I sighed involuntarily, and turned away.

"You are out of spirits, Geoffrey, my dear friend," she said, sitting down by my bed-side, and placing her finger on the pulse of the emaciated hand that lay listlessly on the coverlid; "you must try and overcome these fits of depression or you will never get well. I left you cheerful and hopeful. My dear aunt has been preaching one of her long sermons, and that has made you nervous and melancholy."

Another deep sigh and a shake of the head—I could neither look at her, nor trust myself to speak.

"Your long confinement in this dull room affects your mind, Geoffrey. It is hard to be debarred the glorious air of heaven during such lovely summer weather. But cheer up, brave heart, in a few days, the doctor says, that you may be removed into another room; from the windows you will enjoy a delightful prospect, and watch the sun set every evening behind the purple hills."

"You and your kind aunt are too good to me, Miss Lee. To one in my unfortunate circumstances, it would have been better for me had I died."

"For shame, Geoffrey. Such sentiments are unworthy of you—are ungrateful to the merciful Father who saved you from destruction."

"Why, what inducements have I to live?"

"Many; if it be only to improve the talents that God has committed to your keeping. For this end your life has been spared, and the heavier will be your amount of guilt, if you neglect so great salvation. God has permitted you to assert your innocence—to triumph over your enemy; has saved you from the premeditated malice of that enemy; and do you feel no gratitude to Him for such signal mercies?"

"Indeed I have not thought of my preservation in this way before, nor have I been so grateful as I ought to have been. I have suffered human passions and affections to stand between me and heaven."

"We are all too prone to do that, Geoffrey. The mind, in its natural and unconverted state, cannot comprehend the tender mercies of the Creator. Human nature is so selfish, left to its own guidance, that it needs the purifying influences of religion to lift the soul from grovelling in the dust. I am no bigot—no disputer about creeds and forms of worship, but I know that without God, no one can be happy or contented in any station of life, or under any circumstances."

Seeing that I did not answer, she released the hand that she had retained within her own, and said very gently :

"Forgive me, Geoffrey, if I have wounded your feelings."

"Go on—go on. I could hear you talk for ever, dear Miss Lee."

"You have grown very formal, Geoffrey—why Miss Lee? During your illness, I have been simple Kate."

"But I am getting well now," and I tried to smile ; my heart was too sore. "Oh, Catherine," I cried, "forgive my waywardness, for I am very unhappy."

"You have been placed in very trying circumstances, but I feel an inward conviction that you will overcome them all."

"My grief has nothing to do with that," I said, looking at her very earnestly.

I read in her countenance pity and surprise, but no tenderer emotion.

"May I—dare I, dearest Catherine, unburden my heart to you?"

"Speak freely and candidly, Geoffrey. If I cannot remove the cause of your distress, you may be certain of my advice and sympathy."

"Heaven bless you for that !" I murmured, kissing the hand which disengaged itself gently from my grasp, and with a color somewhat heightened, Catherine bent towards me in a listening attitude.

The ice once broken, I determined to tell her all ; and in low and broken accents I proceeded to inform her of my boyish attachment, and the fond hopes I had dared to entertain, from the kind and flattering manner in which she had returned my attentions at Mr. Moncton's, and of the utter annihilation of these ardently cherished hopes, when informed by Mrs. Hepburn that afternoon, that her affections had been bestowed upon some more fortunate person.

During my incoherent confession, Miss Lee was greatly agitated.

Her face was turned from me, but from the listless attitude of her figure, and the motionless repose of the white hand that fell over the arm of the chair in which she was seated, I saw that she was weeping.

Then came a long, painful pause. Catherine at length wiped away her tears, and broke the oppressive silence.

"Geoffrey," she said, solemnly, "I have been to blame in this. At the time you saved my life (a service for which I can never feel sufficiently grateful, for I value life and all its mercies) I was young and happy, engaged to one, who in many respects, though older by some years, resembled yourself.

"When I met you the second time at your uncle's, disappointment had flung a baleful shade over my first fond anticipations of life ; but, young and sanguine, I still hoped for the best.

"By some strange coincidence, your voice and manner greatly resembled those of the man I loved, and whom I still fondly hoped to meet again. This circumstance attracted me towards you, and I felt great pleasure in conversing with you, as every look and tone reminded me of him. This, doubtless, gave rise

to the attachment you have just revealed to me, and which I must unceasingly lament, as it is impossible for me to make you any adequate return."

"And is my rival still dear to you, Miss Lee?"

Her lips again quivered, and she turned weeping away.

"I read my fate in your silence. You love him yet?"

"And shall continue to love him whilst I have life, Geoffrey Moncton," slowly and suffocatingly broke from the pale lips of the trembling girl.

"And you would have been persuaded by your aunt to marry Theophilus Moncton?"

"Never! Who told you that?" and her eye flashed proudly, almost scornfully upon me."

"Your good aunt."

"She knows nothing about it. I ceased to oppose her wishes in words, because I found that it might produce a rupture between us. Women of my aunt's age, have outlived their sympathies in affairs of the heart. What they once felt they have forgotten, or look upon as a weakness which ought not to be tolerated in their conversations with the young.

"But look at that fine candid face, Geoffrey; that open benevolent brow, and tell me, if having once loved the original, it is such an easy matter to forget or to find a substitute in such a being as Theophilus Moncton."

As she said this she took a portrait that was suspended by a gold chain from the inner folds which covered her beautiful bosom, and placed it in my hand.

"Good heavens!" I cried, sinking back upon the pillow, "my friend, *George Harrison!*"

"Who? I know no one of that name."

"True—true. George Harrison—Philip Mornington—they are one and the same. And his adored and lost Charlotte Laurie, and my beautiful Catherine Lee are identified. I see through it now. He hid the truth from me, fearing that it

might destroy our friendship. Honesty in this, as in all other cases, would have been the best policy."

"Philip is still alive! Not hearing of him for so many months made me conclude that he was either dead or had left England in disgust."

"He still lives, and loves you, Kate, with all the fervor of a first attachment."

"I do not deserve it, Geoffrey. I dared to mistrust his honor, to listen to base calumnies propagated by Theophilus and his father, purposely, I now believe, to injure him in my estimation. But what young girl, ignorant of the world and the ways of designing men, could suspect such a grave, plausible man as Robert Moncton, who, outwardly, always manifested the most affectionate interest in my happiness. I much fear that my coldness had a very bad effect upon Philip's character, and was the means of leading him into excesses, that ultimately led to his ruin."

I was perplexed, and knew not what answer to make, for she had hit upon the plain truth. To tell her so, was to plunge an amiable creature into the deepest affliction, and to withhold it was not doing justice to the friend, whom, above all of his sex, I loved and valued.

With the quick eye of love, and the tact of woman, Kate perceived my confusion, and guessed the cause; she broke into a fit of passionate weeping.

"Dear Kate," I began, with difficulty raising myself on the pillow, "control this violent emotion and I will tell you all I know of my friend."

She looked eagerly up through her tears; but the task I had imposed upon myself was beyond my strength to fulfill. My nerves were so completely shattered by the agitating effects of the past scene, that I sank back exhausted and gasping on the pillow.

"Not now—not now, Geoffrey, you are unequal to the task.

This conversation has tried you too much." And raising my head upon her arm, she bathed my temples with eau de Cologne, and hastened to administer a restorative from the phial that stood on the table.

"I shall be better now I know the worst," I said; and closing my eyes for a few moments, my head rested passively on her snow-white shoulder.

A few hours back, and the touch of those fair hands would have thrilled my whole frame with delight; but now it awoke in me little or no emotion. The beautiful dream had vanished. My adored Catherine Lee was the betrothed of my friend; and I could gaze upon her pale agitated face with calmness—with brotherly, platonic love. I was only now anxious to effect a reconciliation between George and his Kate, and I rejoiced that the means were in all probability in my power.

The entrance of Mrs. Hepburn with letters, put an end to this painful scene; while their contents gave rise to other thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears.

"I cannot read them yet," I said, after having examined the handwriting in which the letters were directed. "My eyes are dim. I am too weak. The rest of an hour will restore me. The sight of these letters makes me nervous, and agitates me too much. They are from Sir Alexander and his daughter, and may contain important tidings."

"Let us go, dear aunt," whispered Kate, slipping her arm through Mrs. Hepburn's. "It will be better to leave Geoffrey for awhile alone."

They left the room instantly. I was relieved by their absence. My heart was oppressed with painful thoughts. I wanted to be alone—to commune with my own spirit, and be still.

A few minutes had scarcely elapsed, and I was sound asleep.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

MY LETTERS.

DAY was waning into night, when I again unclosed my eyes. A sober calm had succeeded the burning agitation of the previous hours. I was no longer a lover—or at least the lover of Catherine Lee. My thoughts had returned to Moncton Park, and in dreams the fairy figure of Margaret had flitted beside me, through its green arcades.

My heart was free to love her who so loved me, and by the light of the lamp I eagerly opened up the letters, which I had grasped during my slumbers tightly in my hand.

But before I could decipher a line, my worthy friend Dan came to the rescue.

“I cannot permit that, master Geoffrey—your eyes are too weak to read such fine penmanship.”

“My good fellow, only a few lines. You must allow me to do that.”

“Not a word. What is the use of all this nursing if you will have your own way? You will be dead at this rate in less than a week.”

“What a deal of trouble that would save you,” said I, looking at him reproachfully.

“Who called it trouble? not I,” said honest Dan. “The trouble is a pleasure if you will only be tractable and obey those who mean you well. Now don’t you see what comes of acting against reason and common sense. You would talk to the mis-

treasure the whole blessed afternoon. Several times I came to the door, and it was still talk, talk, talk—and when my young lady comes home and the old mistress was fairly tired, and walked out to give her tongue a rest, it was still the same with the young one—talk, talk, talk, and no end to the talk, till you well nigh fainted ; and if it had not been for God's Providence that set you off fast asleep, you might have died of the talk fever."

"But I am better now, Daniel—you see the talking did me no harm, but good."

"Tout, tout, man, a bad excuse, you know, is better than none they say. But I think it's far worse, for 'tis generally an invented lie, just to cheat the Devil or one's own conscience ; howsoever, I doubt much, whether the Devil was ever cheated by such practices, but did not always win in the long run by that sort of *stale mate*."

"Are you a chess player ?" I asked in some surprise.

"Ay, just in a small way. Old Jenkins the butler and I, often have a tussle together in his pantry, which sometimes ends in a *stale mate*—he, he, he—Jenkins who is a dry stick, says, that a stale mate, is better than stale fish, or a glass of flat champagne—he, he, he."

"I perfectly agree with Jenkins. But don't you see, my good Daniel, that you blame me for talking with the ladies, and wanting to read a love-letter ; while you are making me act quite as imprudently, by laughing and talking with you."

"A love-letter did you say ?" and he poked his long nose nearly into my face, and squinted down with a glance of intense curiosity at the open letter I still held in my hand. "Why that is rather a temptation to a young gentleman, I must own ; cannot I read it for you, sir ? I am as good a scholar as our clerk."

"I don't at all doubt your capabilities, Simpson. But you see, this is a thing I really can only do for myself. The young lady would not like her letter to be made public."

"Why, Lord, sir, you don't imagine that I would say a word

about it. I have kept secrets before now—ay, and ladies' secrets, too. I was the man that helped your father to carry off Miss Ellen. It was I held the horses at the corner of the lane, while he took her out of the chamber window. I drove them to —— church next morning, and waited at the doors till they were married ; and your poor father gave me five golden guineas to drink the bride's health. Ah ! she was a bride worth the winning—a prettier woman I never saw—she beat my young lady hollow—though some folks do think Miss Catherine a beauty."

"You did not witness the ceremony?"

"No, sir ; but as I sat on the box of the carriage, I saw old Parson Roche go up to the aisle in his white gown, with a book in his hand, and if it were not to marry the young folks, what business had he there?"

"What, indeed," thought I. "This man's evidence may be of great value to me."

I lay silent for some minutes thinking over these circumstances, and quite forgot my letter until reminded of it by Simpson.

"Well, sir, I'm thinking that I will allow you to read that letter ; if you will just put on my spectacles to protect your eyes from the light."

"But I could not see with them, Simpson ; spectacles, like wives, seldom suit anybody but the persons to whom they belong. Besides, you know, that old eyes and young eyes never behold the same objects alike."

"Maybe," said the old man. "But do just wait patiently until I can prop you up in the bed, and put the lamp near enough for you to see that small writing. Tzet, tzet—what a pity it is that young ladies, now-a-days, are ashamed of writing a good, legible hand. You will require a double pair of specs to read yon."

The old man's curiosity was almost as great as his kindness ; and I should have felt annoyed at his peeping and prying over my

shoulder, had I not been certain that he could not decipher, without the aid of the said spectacles, a single word of the contents.

I was getting tired of his loquacity, and was at last obliged to request him to go, which he did most reluctantly, begging me as he left the room to have mercy on my poor eyes.

There was some need of the caution ; the fever had left me so weak that it was with great difficulty I succeeded in reading Margaretta's letter.

“DEAR COUSIN GEOFFREY :

“We parted with an assurance of mutual friendship. I shall not waste words in apologizing for writing to you. As a friend I may continue to love and value you, convinced that the heart in which I trust will never condemn me for the confidence I repose in it.

“I have suffered a severe affliction since you left us, in the death of poor Alice, which took place a fortnight ago. She died in a very unsatisfactory frame of mind, anxious to the last to behold her unprincipled husband or Dinah North. The latter, however, has disappeared, and no trace of her can be discovered.

“There was some secret, perhaps the same that you endeavored so fruitlessly to wrest from her, that lay heavily upon the poor girl's conscience, and which she appeared eager to communicate after the power of utterance had fled. The repeated mention of her brother's name during the day which preceded her dissolution, led me to the conclusion that whatever she had to divulge was connected with him.

“But she is gone, and the secret has perished with her, a circumstance which we may all have cause to regret.

“And this is the first time, Geoffrey, that I have looked upon death—the death of one, whom from infancy I have loved as a sister.

"The sight has filled me with awe and terror ; the more so, because I feel a strange presentiment that my own end is not far distant.

"This, my dear cousin, you will say is the natural result of watching the decay of one so young and beautiful as Alice Mornington—one, who, a few brief months ago, was full of life, and health, and hope—that her death has brought more forcibly before me the prospect of my own mortality.

"Perhaps it is so. I do not wish to die, Geoffrey ; life, for me, has many charms. I love my dear father tenderly. To his fond eyes I am the light of life—the sole thing that remains to him of my mother. I would live for his sake to cherish and comfort him in his old age. I love the dear old homestead with all its domestic associations, and I could not bid adieu to you, my dear cousin, without keen regret.

"And then, the glorious face of nature—the fields, the flowers, the glad, bright sunbeams, the rejoicing song of birds, the voice of waters, the whispered melodies of wind-stirred leaves, the green solitudes of the dim mysterious forest, I love—oh, how I love them all !

"Yes, these are dear to my heart and memory ; yet I wander discontentedly amid my favorite haunts. My eyes are ever turned to the earth. A spirit seems to whisper to me in low tones, 'Open thy arms, mother, to receive thy child.'

"I struggle with these waking phantasies ; my eyes are full of tears. I feel the want of companionship. I long for some friendly bosom to share my grief and wipe away my tears. The sunshine of my heart has vanished. Ah, my dear friend, how earnestly I long for your return ! Do write, and let us know how you have sped. My father came back to the Hall the day after the funeral of poor Alice. He marvels like me at your long silence. He has important news to communicate which I must not forestall

"Write soon, and let us know that you are well and happy ; a line from you will cheer my drooping heart.

"Yours, in the sincerity of love,

"MARGARETTA MONCTON.

"MONCTON PARK, *July 22, 18—.*"

I read this letter over several times, until the characters became misty, and I could no longer form them into words. A thousand times, I pressed it to my lips and vowed eternal fidelity to the dear writer. Yet—what a mournful tale it told. The love but half-concealed, was apparent in every line. I felt bitterly, that I was the cause of her dejection—that hopeless affection for me was undermining her health.

I would write to her instantly—would tell her all. Alas, my hand, unnerved by long illness, could no longer guide the pen—and how could I employ the hand of another ? I cursed my unlucky accident, and the unworthy cause of it ; and in order to divert my thoughts from this melancholy subject, I eagerly tore open Sir Alexander's letter.

The paper fell from my grasp, I was not able to read.

Mrs. Hepburn appeared like a good angel, followed by honest Dan, bearing candles, and the most refreshing of all viands to an invalid,—a delicious cup of fragrant tea, the very smell of which was reviving ; and whilst deliberately sipping the contents of my second cup, I requested Mrs. Hepburn, as a great favor, to read to me Sir Alexander's letter.

"Perhaps it may contain family secrets ?" she said, with an inquiring look, whilst her hand rested rather tenaciously upon the closely written sheets.

"After the confidence which we have mutually reposed in each other, my dear Madam, I can have no secret to conceal. You are acquainted with my private history, and I flatter myself, that neither you nor your amiable niece, are indifferent to my future welfare."

"You only do us justice, Geoffrey," said the kind woman, affectionately pressing my hand, after readjusting my pillows. "I love you for your mother's sake. I prize you for your own ; and I hope you will allow me to consider you in the light of that son, of whom Heaven early deprived me."

"You make a rich man of me at once," I cried, respectfully kissing her hand. How can I be poor while I possess so many excellent friends. Robert Moncton, with all his wealth, is a beggar, when compared to the hitherto despised Geoffrey."

"Well, let us leave off complimenting each other," said Mrs. Hepburn, laughing ; "and please to lie down like a good boy and compose yourself, and listen attentively to what your uncle has to say to you."

"MY DEAR GEOFF :—

"What the deuce, man, has happened to you, that we have received no tidings from you. Have you and old Dinah eloped together on the back of a broomstick. The old hag's disappearance looks rather suspicious. Madge does little else than pine and fret for your return. I begin to feel quite jealous of you in that quarter.

"I have a long tale to tell you, and scarcely know where to begin. Next to taking doctor's stuff, I detest letter writing, and were you not a great favorite, the pens, ink and paper might go to the bottom of the river, before I would employ them to communicate a single thought.

"I had a very pleasant journey to London, which terminated in a very unpleasant visit to your *worthy* uncle. It was not without great repugnance that I condescended to enter the villain's house, particularly when I reflected on the errand which took me there.

"He received me with one of his blandest smiles, and inquired

after my health with such affectionate interest, that it would have led a stranger to imagine that he really wished me well, instead of occupying a snug corner in the family vault.

“How I abhor this man’s hypocrisy. Bad as he is—it is the very worst feature in his character. I cut all his compliments short, by informing him that the object of my visit was one of a very unpleasant nature, that required his immediate attention.

“He looked very cold and spiteful.

“‘I anticipate your business,’ he said ; ‘Geoffrey Moncton, I am informed, has found an asylum with you, and I suppose you are anxious to effect a reconciliation between us. If such be the purport of your visit, Sir Alexander—your journey must prove in vain. I never will forgive that ungrateful young man, nor admit him again into my presence.’

“‘You have injured him too deeply, Robert,’ I said, calmly, for you know, Geoff—that it is of little use of flying into a passion with your cold-blooded uncle ; he is not generous enough to get insulted and show fight like another man—‘Geoffrey does not wish it, and I, should scorn to ask it in his name.’

“The man of law looked incredulous, but did not choose to venture a reply.

“‘It is not of Geoffrey Moncton, the independent warm-hearted orphan, I wished to speak—who thank God ! has pluck enough to take his own part, and speak for himself. It is of one, who is a disgrace to his name and family. I mean your son, Theophilus.’

“‘Really, Sir Alexander, you take a great deal of trouble about matters which do not concern you’ (he said this with a sarcastic sneer), ‘my son is greatly indebted to you for such disinterested kindness.’

“His cool impudence provoked me beyond endurance—I felt a wicked pleasure in retaliation, which God forgive me, was

far from a Christian spirit. But I despised the rascal too much at that moment to pity him.

“‘My interference in this matter concerns me more nearly than you imagine, Mr. Moncton. Your son’s unfortunate wife attempted suicide, but was prevented in the act of drowning herself by the nephew you have traduced and treated so basely.’

“‘Damn her! why did he not let her drown?’ thundered forth your uncle.

“‘Because his heart was not hardened in villainy like your own. Your daughter-in-law now lies dying at my house, and I wish to transfer the responsibility from my hands into your own.’

“‘It was your fault that they ever met,’ he cried. ‘Your love of low society, that threw them together. Theophilus was not a man to make such a fool of himself—such an infernal fool!’

“And then the torrent burst. The man became transformed into the demon. He stamped and raved—and tore his hair, and cursed, with the most horrid and blasphemous oaths, the son who had followed so closely in his steps. Such a scene I never before witnessed—such a spectacle of human depravity may it never be my lot to behold again. In the midst of his incoherent ravings, he actually threatened, as the consummation of his indignation against his son, to make you his heir.

“Such is the contradiction inherent in our fallen nature, that he would exalt the man he hates, to revenge himself upon the son who has given the death-blow to the selfish pride which has marked his crooked path through life.

“I left the man of sin in deep disgust. It made me think very humbly of myself. Faith, Geoff, when I look back on my own early career, I begin to think that we are a vile bad set; and without you and Madge raise the moral tone of the family char-

acter there is small chance of any of the other members finding their way to heaven.

"I spent a couple of quiet days with my old friend Onslow, and then commenced my journey home.

"At a small village about thirty miles from London, I was overtaken by such a violent storm of thunder and rain, that I had to put up at the only inn in the place for the night.

"In the passage I was accosted by an old man of pleasing demeanor, and with somewhat of a foreign aspect, who inquired if he had the honor of speaking to Sir Alexander Moncton? I said yes, but that he had the advantage of me, as I believed him to be a perfect stranger.

"He appeared embarrassed, and said, that he did not wonder at my forgetting him, as it was only in a subordinate situation I had ever seen him, and that was many years ago.

"I now looked hard at the man, and a conviction of often having seen him before flashed into my mind. It was an image connected with bygone years—years of folly and dissipation.

"'Surely you are not William Walters, who for such a long time was the friend and confidant of Robert Moncton.'

"'The same, at your service.'

"'Mr. Walters,' said I, turning on my heel, 'I have no wish to resume the acquaintance.'

"'You are right,' he replied, and was silent for a minute or so, then resumed, in a grave and humble tone; 'Sir Alexander, I trust we are both better men, or the experience and sorrows of years have been given to us in vain. I can truly say, that I have deeply repented of my former sinful life, and I trust that my repentance has been accepted by that God before whom we must both soon appear. Still, I cannot blame you, for wishing to have no further intercourse with one whom you only knew as an immoral and unprincipled man. But for the sake of a young man, who, if living, is a near connection of yours, I beg you to listen patiently to what I have to say.'

“‘If your communication has reference to Geoffrey, the son of Edward Moncton, and nephew to Robert, I am entirely at your service.’

“‘He is the man! I have left a comfortable home in the United States, and returned to England with the sole object in view, of settling a moral debt which has lain a long time painfully on my conscience. I was just on my way to Moncton Park to speak to you on this important subject.’

“My dear Geoff, you may imagine the feelings with which I heard this announcement. Had I been alone, I should have snapped my fingers, whistled, shouted for joy—anything that would have diminished with safety the suffocating feeling at my heart. I was so glad—I never knew how dear you were to me until then. So I invited the solemn, and rather puritanical looking white-headed man to partake of my dinner, and spend the evening in my apartment, in order to get out of him all that I could concerning you. The result was most satisfactory. There was no need of bribes or nut-crackers; he was anxious to make a clean breast of it, for which I gave him ample absolution.

“Here is his confession, as well as I can remember it.

“‘My acquaintance with Robert Moncton commenced at school. I was the only son of a rich banker in the city of Norwich. My father was generous to a fault, and allowed me more pocket-money than my young companions could boast of receiving from their friends at home.

“‘My father had risen, by a train of fortunate circumstances, from a very humble station in life, and was ostentatiously proud of his wealth. He was particularly anxious for me to pass for the son of a very rich man at school, which he fancied would secure for me powerful friends, and their interest in my journey through life.’

“‘I was not at all averse to his plans, which I carried out to their fullest extent, and went by the name of *Ready-Money Jack*, among my school-mates, who I have no doubt whispered

behind my back, that—fools and their money are soon parted—for you know, Sir Alexander, this is the way of the world. And there is no place in which the world and its selfish maxims are more fully exemplified than in a large boarding-school.

“ ‘I had not been long at school when the two Monctons were admitted to the same class with myself. Edward was a dash-ing, eloquent, brave lad ; more remarkable for a fine appearance and an admirable temper, than for any particular talent. He was a very popular boy, but somehow or other we did not take to each other.

“ ‘The boyish vanity fostered by my father, made me wish to be considered the first lad in the school ; a notion which Edward took good care to keep down ; and fretted and galled by his assumption of superiority, I turned to Robert, who was every-thing but friendly to Edward, to support my cause and back me in my quarrels.

“ ‘Robert was a handsome, gentlemanly-looking lad, but quite the reverse of Edward. He hated rough play, learned his lessons with indefatigable industry, and took good care to keep himself out of harm’s way. He was the pattern boy of the school. The favorite with all the teachers.

“ ‘He possessed a grave, specious manner—a cold quiet dignity, which imposed upon the ignorant and unsuspecting ; and his love of money was a passion that drew all the blood from his stern proud heart.

“ ‘He saw that I was frank and vain, and he determined to profit by my weakness. I did not want for natural capacity, but I was a sad idler.

“ ‘Robert was shrewd and persevering, and I paid him hand-somely for doing my sums and writing my Latin exercises. We became firm friends, and I loved him for years with more sincerity than he deserved.

“ ‘As I advanced towards manhood, my poor father met with

great losses ; and on the failure of a large firm with which his own was principally connected, he became a bankrupt.

“Solely dependent upon my rich father, without any fixed aim or object in life, I had just made a most imprudent marriage, when his death, which happened almost immediately upon his reverse of fortune, awoke me to the melancholy reality that stared me in the face.

“In my distress I wrote to Robert Moncton, who had just commenced practice at his old office in Hatton Garden. He answered my appeal to his charity promptly, and gave me a seat in his office as engrossing clerk, with a very liberal salary which, I need not assure you, was most thankfully accepted by a person in my reduced circumstances.

“This place I filled entirely to his satisfaction for fifteen years, until I was the father of twelve children.

“My salary was large, but, alas ! it was the wages of sin. All Robert Moncton’s dirty work was confided to my hands. I was his creature—the companion of his worst hours—and he paid me liberally for my devotion to his interests. But for all this, there were moments in my worthless life—when better feelings prevailed—when I loathed the degrading trammels in which I was bound ; and often, on the bosom of a dear and affectionate wife, I lamented bitterly my fallen state.

“About this period Edward Moncton died, and Robert was appointed guardian to his orphan child. Property there was none—barely sufficient to pay the expenses of the funeral. Robert supplied from his own purse £50, towards the support of the young widow, until she could look about and obtain a situation as a day governess or a teacher in a school, for which she was eminently qualified.

“I never shall forget the unnatural joy displayed by Robert on this melancholy occasion.

““Thank God ! William,” he said, clapping me on the

shoulder, after he had read the letter which poor Mrs. Moncton wrote to inform him of her sudden bereavement, "Edward is dead. There is only one stumbling-block left in my path, and I will soon kick that out of the way."

"Three months had scarcely elapsed before I went to — with Robert Moncton, to attend the funeral of his sister-in-law.

"The sight of the fine boy that acted as chief mourner in that mournful ceremony cut me to the heart. I was a father myself — a fond father — and I longed to adopt the poor, friendless child. But what could a man do who had a dozen of his own?

"As we were on our road to —, Robert had confided to me his plans for setting aside his nephew's claims to the estates and title of Moncton, in case you should die without a male heir. The secluded life that Mrs. Moncton had led since her marriage; her want of relatives to interest themselves in her behalf, and the dissipated habits of her husband, who had lost all his fine property at the gaming-table, made the scheme not only feasible, but presented few obstacles to its accomplishment.

"Inexpressibly shocked at this piece of daring villainy, I dissembled my indignation, and while I appeared to acquiesce in his views, I secretly determined to befriend, if possible, the innocent child.

"The night prior to the funeral, he called me into his private office, and after chatting over a matter of little consequence, he said to me in a careless manner:—

"By the by, Walters, Basset told me the other day, that you had taken a craze to go to America. This is your wife's doings, I suppose. I don't suffer Mrs. Moncton to settle such matters for me. But is it true?"

"I said that it had been on my mind for a long time. The want of funds alone preventing me from emigrating with my family."

“ “ “If that is all, the want of money need not hinder you. But mind, Walters, I am not generous, I expect something for my gold. You have been faithful to me, and I am anxious to show you that I am not insensible to your merit. We are old friends, Walt—we understand each other; we are not troubled with nice scruples, and dare to call things by their right names. But to the point.

“ “ “This boy of my brother's, as I was telling you, is a thorn in my side, which you can remove.”

“ “ “In what way?” I said, in a tone of alarm.

“ “ “Don't look blue;” and he laughed. “I kill with the tongue and the pen, and leave to fools the pistol and the knife. You must go to the Parish of —— among the Derby hills, where Edward was married, and where he resided, enacting love in a cottage, with his pretty, penniless bride, until after this boy, Geoffrey, was born—and subtract, if possible, the leaves from the church-books that contain these important registries. Do this with your usual address, and I will meet all the expenses of your intended emigration.”

“ “ “The offer was tempting to a poor man, but I still hesitated, conjuring up a thousand difficulties which either awoke his mirth or scorn.

“ “ “The only difficulty that I can find in the business,” he said, “is your unwillingness to undertake it. The miserable old wretch employed as clerk in the church, is quite superannuated. A small bribe will win him to your purpose, especially as Mr. Roche, the incumbent, is just now at the sea-side, whither he is gone in the delusive hope of curing old age. Possessed of these registers, I will defy the boy to substantiate his claims, provided that he lives to be a man, for I have carefully destroyed all the other documents which could lead to prove the legality of his title. The old gardener and his nurse must be persuaded to accompany you to America. Old Roche is on his last legs—

from him I shall soon have nothing to fear. What do you say to my proposal—yes or no?”

““Yes,” I stammered out, “I will undertake it, as it is to be the last affair of the kind in which I mean to engage.”

““You will forget it,” said he, “before you have half crossed the Atlantic, and can begin the world with a new character. I will give you five hundred pounds to commence with.”

““This iniquitous bargain concluded, I went down the day after the funeral to —, on my honorable mission. As my employer anticipated, a few shillings to the old clerk placed the church-books at my disposal, from which I carefully cut the leaves (which, in that quiet, out-of-the-way hamlet, were not likely to be missed) that contained the registries. In a small hut among the hills I found the old gardener and his widowed daughter, who had been nurse to Geoffrey and his mother, whom I talked into a fever of enthusiasm about America, and the happy life that people led there, which ended in my engaging them to accompany me. Good and valuable servants they both proved. They are since dead.’

“‘And what became of the registries? Did you destroy them?’

““I tried to do it, Sir Alexander, but it seemed as if an angel stayed my hand, and yielding to my impressions at the moment, I placed them carefully among my private papers. Here they are;’ and taking from his breast-pocket an old-fashioned black leathern wallet, he placed them in my hand.

“‘Here, too,’ he said, ‘is an affidavit, made by Michael Alzure on his dying bed, before competent witnesses, declaring that he was present with his daughter Mary, when the ceremony took place.’

“‘This is enough,’ said I, joyfully, and shaking the old sinner heartily by the hand. ‘The king shall have his own again. But how did you hoodwink that sagacious hawk, Robert Moncton?’

“ ‘He was from home when I returned to London, attending the assizes at Bury. I found a letter from him containing a draft upon his banker for five hundred pounds, and requesting me to deposit the papers in the iron chest in the garret of which I had the key. I wrote in reply, that I had done so, and he was perfectly satisfied with my sincerity, which during fifteen years I had never given him the least cause to doubt.

“ ‘The next week, I sailed for the United States with my family, determined, from henceforth, to drop all connection with Robert Moncton, and to endeavor to obtain an honest living.

“ ‘It has pleased God to bless all my undertakings—I am now a rich and prosperous man—my children are married and settled on good farms, in the same neighborhood, and enjoying the common comforts and many of the luxuries of life. Still, that little orphan boy haunted me—I could not be happy while I knew that I had been the means of doing him a foul injury, and I determined, as soon as I knew that the lad must be of age, to make a voyage to England, and place in your hands the proofs I held of his legitimacy.

“ ‘Your powerful assistance, Sir Alexander, and these papers, will I trust restore to him his lawful place in society, and I am here to witness against Robert Moncton’s villainy.’

“ ‘Well, Sir Geoffrey Moncton, that will be, what do you say to your old uncle’s budget? Is not this news worth the postage? Worth throwing up one’s cap and crying hurrah—and better still, dropping down upon your knees in the solitude of your own chamber, and whispering in your clasped hands, ‘Thank God for all his mercies to me, a sinner?’ If you omit the prayer, I have not omitted it for you, for most fervently I blessed the Almighty Father for this signal instance of his love.

“ ‘I returned to the Park, so elated with the result of my journey, that I could scarcely sympathize in the grief of my

poor girl, for the death of her foster-sister, which took place during my absence.

"Old Dinah is off. Perhaps gone somewhat before her time to her appointed place.

"It is useless your remaining longer in Derbyshire, as we already possess all you want to know, and you must lose no time in commencing a suit against your uncle for conspiracy in order to defraud you out of your rights. Robert's character will never stand the test of this infamous exposure.

"My sweet Madge looks ill and delicate, and like the old father, pines to see you again. You young scamp—you have taken a strange hold on the heart of your attached kinsman and faithful friend,

"ALEXANDER MONCTON."

I made my kind friend, Mrs. Hepburn, read over this important letter twice. It was the longest, I verily believe, that the worthy scribe ever penned in his life, and which nothing but his affection for me, could have induced him to write.

"God bless him!" I cried fervently, "how I long to see him again, and thank him 'from my very heart, for all he has done for me."

I was so elated, that I wanted to leave my bed instantly and commence my journey to the Park.

This was but a momentary delusion—I was too weak, when I made the trial, to sit upright, or even to hold a pen, which was the most provoking of the two.

Mrs. Hepburn, at my earnest solicitation, wrote to Sir Alexander, a long and circumstantial account of all that had befallen me since I left Moncton.

That night was full of restless tossings to and fro. I sought rest, but found it not; nay, I could not even think with calmness, and the result was as might have been expected, a great increase of fever, and for several days I was not only worse, but in considerable danger.

Nothing could be more tantalizing than this provoking relapse. A miserable presentiment of evil clouded my mind—my anxiety to write to Margaretta was painfully intense, and this was a species of communication which I could not very well convey through another.

To this unfortunate delay, I have attributed much of the sorrows of after years.

Our will is free to plan. Our opportunities of action are in the hands of God—what I most ardently desired to do I was prevented from doing by physical weakness. How, then, can any man affirm that his destiny is in his own hands, when circumstances form a chain around him, as strong as fate, and the mind battles in vain against a host of trifles, despicable enough when viewed singly, but when taken in combination, possessing gigantic strength?

Another painful week wore slowly away, at the end of which I was able to sit up in a loose dressing-gown for several hours during the day.

I lost not a moment in writing to Margaretta directly I was able to hold a pen. I informed her of all that had passed between me and Catherine, and laid open my whole heart to her, without the least reserve. Deeming myself unworthy of her love, I left all to her generosity. I dispatched my letter with a thousand uncomfortable misgivings as to what effect it might produce upon the sensitive mind of my little cousin.

To write a long letter to George Harrison was the next duty I had to perform ; but when I reflected on the delight which my communication could not fail to convey, this was not only an easy, but a delightful task.

I had already arrived at the second closely written sheet, when a light tap at the door of the room announced the presence of Kate Lee.

“What, busy writing still, Geoffrey? What will honest Dan say to this rebellious conduct on the part of his patient? You

must lay aside pens and paper for this day. Your face is flushed and feverish. Don't shake your head, my word is despotic in this house—I must be obeyed.”

“Wait a few minutes, dear Miss Lee, and your will shall be absolute. It was because I am writing of you, that my letter has run to such an unconscionable length.”

“Of me, Geoffrey?”

“Yes, of you, my charming friend.”

“Nay, you are joking, Mr. Moncton. You would never distress me, by writing of me to strangers?”

“Strangers—oh no—but this is to one who is most dear to us both.”

Catherine turned very pale.

“Geoffrey, I hope that you have not said anything that I could wish unsaid?”

“Do not look like a scared dove, sweet Kate. Have a little patience, and you shall read the letter.”

“That is asking too much; I will trust to your honor—that innate sense of delicacy which I know you possess.”

“You shall read the letter—I insist upon it. If you do not like it, I will write another. But you must sit down by me and listen to what I have to tell you, of my poor friend's history.”

She turned her glistening eyes upon me, full of grateful thanks, and seated herself beside me on the couch. I then recounted to her the history that George had confided to me, though the narration was often interrupted by the sighs and tears of my attentive auditor.

After the melancholy tale was told, a long silence ensued. Poor Kate was too busy with her own thoughts to speak. I put the letter I had been writing into her hands, and retired to my own chamber, which opened into the one in which we were sitting, whilst she perused it. It was a simple statement of the

facts related above. I had left him to draw from them what inference he pleased.

When I returned an hour after to the sitting-room, which had been fitted up as such entirely for my accommodation, the windows opening into a balcony that ran along the whole front of the house, I found Kate leaning upon the railing, with the open letter still in her hand.

Her fine eyes were raised and full of tears, but she looked serene and happy, her beautiful face reminding me of an April sun just emerging from a soft fleecy cloud, which dimmed, only to increase by softening, the glory which it could not conceal.

"Well, dear Kate, may I finish my letter to George—for I must call him so still?"

"No."

"Why not," I said, surprised, and half angry.

"Because I mean to finish it myself—will you give me permission?"

"By all means : it will make him so happy."

"And you are not jealous?" And as she said this, she bent upon me a curious and searching glance.

"Not now ; a few weeks ago I should have been. To tell you the truth, dear Kate, I am too egotistical a fellow to love one who does not love me. I truly rejoice in the anticipated happiness of my friend."

Methought she looked a little disappointed, but recovering herself, she added quickly—

"This is as it should be, yet I must own that my woman's vanity is a little hurt at the coolness of your philosophy. We all love power, Geoffrey, and do not like to lose it. Yet I am sincerely glad that you have conquered an attachment which would have rendered us both miserable. No fear of a broken heart in your case."

"Such things have been, and may be again, Kate, but I believe them to belong more to the poetry than the reality of life. Hearts are made of tough materials. They don't choose to break in the right place, and just when and where we want them."

She laughed, and asked when I thought I should be able to commence my journey to Moncton Park !

"In a few days I hope. I feel growing better every hour ; my mind recovers elasticity with returning strength. But how I shall ever repay you, dear Miss Lee, and your excellent aunt, for your care and kindness, puzzles me."

"Geoffrey, your accident has been productive of great good to us all, so say no more about it. I, for one, consider myself in your debt. You have made two friends, whom a cruel destiny had separated, most happy."

CHAPTER XXIX.

A WELCOME AND AN UNWELCOME MEETING.

THREE days had scarcely elapsed, when I found myself mounted on my good steed, and gaily trotting along the road on my way to Moncton Park.

Honest Dan Simpson insisted on being my companion for the first stage. "Just," he said, "to take care of me, and see how I got along." I could gladly have dispensed with his company, for I longed to be alone—but to hurt the good fellow's feelings, would have been the height of ingratitude.

He had indignantly rejected the ample remuneration which Sir Alexander had remitted for his services.

"I took care of you for love, Sir. It was no trouble, but a pleasure. As to money—I don't want it, I have saved a good pile for old age, and have neither wife nor child to give it to when I die. Lord, sir, I was afraid that you would take it ill, or I was going to ask you if you wanted any. I should have been proud to accommodate you, until you had plenty of your own."

I could have hugged the dear old man in my arms. Fortunately my being on horseback prevented such an excess. I turned to him to speak my thanks, but a choking in my throat prevented my uttering a word. He caught the glance of my moist eye, and dashed the dew, with his hard hand, from his own.

"I know what you would say, Mr. Geoffrey. But you need not say it. It would only make me feel bad."

"I shall never forget your kindness, Dan. But will always reckon you among my best friends."

"That's enough, sir—I'm satisfied, overpaid," and the true-hearted fellow rode close up to me and held out his hand. I shook it warmly. He turned his horse quickly round, and the sharp ringing of his hoofs on the rocky road told me that he was gone.

I rode slowly on ; the day was oppressively warm, not a breath of air stirred the bushes by the road-side, or shook the dust from the tawny leaves which already had lost their tender green, and were embrowned beneath the hot gaze of the August noon-day sun.

Overcome by the heat, and languid from my long confinement to a sick room, I often checked my horse and sauntered slowly along, keeping the shady side of the road, and envying the cattle in the meadows standing mid leg in the shallow streams.

"There will surely be a storm before night," I said, looking wistfully up to the cloudless sky, which very much resembled Job's description of a molten looking-glass. "I feel the breath of the tempest in this scorching air. A little rain would lay the dust, and render to-morrow's journey less fatiguing."

My soliloquy was interrupted by the sharp click of a horse's hoofs behind me, and presently his rider passed me at full speed. A transient glance at the stranger's face made me suddenly recoil.

It was Robert Moncton.

He looked pale and haggard, and his countenance wore an unusual appearance of anxiety and care. He did not notice me, and checking my horse, I felt relieved when a turning in the road hid him from my sight.

His presence appeared like a bad omen. A heavy gloom sunk upon my spirits, and I felt half inclined to halt at the

small village I was approaching and rest until the heat of the day had subsided, and I could resume my journey in the cool of the evening.

Ashamed of such weakness, I resolutely turned my face from every house of entertainment I passed, and had nearly cleared the long straggling line of picturesque white-washed cottages, which composed the larger portion of the village, when the figure of a gentleman pacing to and fro, in front of a decent-looking inn, arrested my attention. There was something in the air and manner of this person, which appeared familiar to me. He raised his head as I rode up to the door. The recognition was mutual.

“Geoffrey Moncton !”

“George Harrison ! Who would have thought of meeting you in this out of the way place ?”

“There is an old saying, Geoffrey—talk of the Devil and he is sure to appear. I was thinking of you at the very moment, and raising my eyes saw you before me.”

“Ay, that is one of the mysteries of mind, which has still to be solved,” said I, as I dismounted from my horse and followed George into the house. “I am so heartily glad to see you old fellow,” I cried, embracing him warmly, directly we were alone—I have a thousand things to say to you, which could not be crowded into the short compass of a letter.”

“Hush—don’t speak so loud,” and he glanced suspiciously round. “These walls may have ears. I know, that they contain one, whom you would not much like to trust with your secrets.”

“How—Is *he* here ?”

“You know whom I mean ?”

“Robert Moncton ? He passed me on the road.”

“Did he recognize you ?”

“I think not. His hat was slouched over his forehead ; his

eyes bent moodily on the ground. Besides, George, I am so greatly altered by my long illness ; I am surprised that you knew me again."

"Love and hatred, are great sharpeners of the memory. It is as hard to forget an enemy as a friend. But to tell you the truth, Geoff, I had to look at you twice before I knew who you were. But come up stairs—I have a nice snug room, where we can chat in private whilst dinner is preparing."

"I should like to know what brings Robert Moncton this road,"—and I flung my weary length upon a crazy old sofa, that occupied a place in the room more for ornament than use, and whose gay chintz cover, like charity, hid a multitude of defects. "No good I fear."

"I cannot exactly tell. There is some new scheme in the wind. Harry Bell, who fills my old place in his office, informed me that a partial reconciliation had taken place between father and son. This was by letter, for no personal interview had brought them together. Theophilus was on his way to Moncton, and appointed the old rascal to meet him somewhere on the road. What the object of their meeting may be, time alone can discover. Perhaps, to discover Dinah North's place of concealment, or to ascertain if the old hag be dead. Her secrecy on some points of their history is a matter of great moment.

"They are a pair of precious scoundrels, and their confederation portends little good to me."

"You need not care a rush for them now, Geoffrey, you are beyond the reach of their malice. Moncton is not aware of the return of Walters. This circumstance will be a death-blow to his ambitious hopes. How devoutly they must have wished you in Heaven during your illness."

"At one time, I almost wished myself there."

"You were not too ill to forget your friend, Geoffrey," and he rose and pressed my hand warmly between his own. "How

can I thank you sufficiently for your disinterested kindness. By your generous sacrifice of self you have made me the happiest of men. I am now on my way to Elm Grove to meet one, whom I never hoped to meet in this world again."

"Say nothing about it, George. The sacrifice may be less disinterested than you imagine—I no longer regret it, and am heartily glad that I have been instrumental to this joyful change in your prospects."

"But why, my good fellow, did you conceal from me the name of the beloved. Had you candidly told me who the lady was, I should not have wounded by my coldness a dear and faithful heart."

"Your mind was so occupied by the image of Kate Lee—I dared not."

"It would have saved me a deal of misery."

"And destroyed our friendship."

"You don't know me, George; honesty would have been the best policy, as it always is, in all cases. I could have given up Kate when I knew that she loved, and was beloved by, my friend. Your want of candor and confidence may have been the means of destroying Margareta Moncton."

"Do not look so dreadfully severe, Geoffrey. I admit that truth is the best guide of all our actions. It was my love for you, however, which led me to disguise the name of Catherine Lee. You don't know what a jealous fellow you are, and, at that time, you were too much excited and too ill to hear the truth. What I did for the best has turned out, as it sometimes does, quite contrary to my wishes. You must forgive me, Geoffrey. It is the first time I ever deceived you, and it will be the last."

He took my hand and looked earnestly into my face, with those mild, melancholy eyes. To be angry long with him was impossible. It was far more easy to be angry with myself; so,

I told him that I forgave him from my very heart, and would no longer harbor against him an unkind thought.

I was still far from well, low-spirited and out of humor with myself and the whole world. I felt depressed with the mysterious and unaccountable dejection of mind, which often precedes some unlooked-for calamity.

In vain were all my efforts to rouse myself from this morbid lethargy. The dark cloud that weighed down my spirits would not be dispelled. I strove to be gay; the laugh died upon my lips or was choked by involuntary sighs. George, who was anxiously watching my countenance, rose and walked to the window—and, tired of my uneasy position on the hard, crazy, old sofa—and willing to turn the current of my thoughts from flowing in such a turbid bed—I followed his example.

We stood for a while in silence, watching the groups which occasionally gathered beneath the archway of the little inn, to discuss the news of the village.

“You are not well, Geoffrey. Your journey has fatigued you. Lie down and rest for a few hours.”

“Sleep is out of the question, in my present feverish state. I will resume my journey.”

“What, in the face of the storm that is rapidly gathering! Do you see that heavy cloud in the northwest?”

“I am not afraid of thunder.”

“It has a particular effect upon some people. It gives me an intolerable headache, hours before it is even apparent in the heavens. To this cause I attribute your sudden depression of spirits.”

I shook my head sceptically.

“Then, do tell me, dear Geoff, what it is that disturbs you?”

“My own thoughts. Do not laugh, George. These things to the sufferer are terrible realities. I am oppressed by melan-

choly anticipations of evil. A painful consciousness of approaching sorrow." I have experienced this often before, but never to such an extent as to-day. Let me have my own way. It is good for me to combat with the evil genius alone."

"I think not. Duty compels us to combat with such feelings. The indulgence of them tends to shake our reliance on the mercy of God, and to render us unhappy and discontented."

"This is one of the mysteries of mind which we cannot comprehend. The links which unite the visible with the invisible world. But whether they have their origin from above or beneath is, to me, very doubtful—unless such presentiments operate as a warning to shun impending danger.

"I hear no admonitory voice within. All is dark, still and heavy, like the black calm that slumbers in the dense folds of you thunder-cloud; as if the mind was suddenly deprived of all vital energy, and crouched beneath an overwhelming consciousness of horror."

George gave me a sudden sidelong scrutinizing glance, as if he suspected my recent accident had impaired my reason.

A vivid flash of lightning, followed by a sudden crash of thunder, made us start some paces back from the window, and a horseman dashed at full speed into the inn yard.

Another blinding flash—another roar of thunder, which seemed to fill the whole earth and heavens, made me involuntarily close my eyes, when an exclamation from George—"Good heavens, what an escape!"—made me as quickly hurry to the window.

The lightning had struck down the horse and rider whom we had before observed. The nobler animal alone was slain.

The avenging bolt of heaven had passed over and left the head of the miscreant, Theophilus Moncton, unscathed.

Livid with recent terror, and not over-pleased with the loss of the fine animal at his feet, he cast a menacing glance at the

lowering sky above, and bidding the ostler with an oath (which sounded like double blasphemy in our ears) to take care of the saddle and bridle, he entered the inn, shaking the mud and rain from his garments, and muttering indistinct curses on his ill-luck.

"The blasphemous wretch !" I cried, drawing a long breath. "Bad as the father is, he is an angel when compared with the son."

"Geoffrey, he is what the father has made him. I would give much to witness the meeting."

"You would see a frightful picture of human guilt and depravity. Half his fortune would scarcely bribe me to witness such a revolting scene."

The rain was now pouring in torrents, and one inky hue had overspread the whole heavens. Finding that we were likely to be detained some hours, George ordered dinner, and we determined to make ourselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit.

All our efforts to provoke mirth, however, proved abortive. The silence of our meal was alone broken by the dull clattering of knives and forks, and the tinkling of the bell to summon the brisk waiter to bring wine and draw the cloth. But if we were silent, an active spirit was abroad in the house, and voices in loud and vehement altercation in the room adjoining, arrested our attention.

The muttered curse, the restless, impatient walking to and fro, convinced us that the parties were no other than Robert Moncton and his son, and that their meeting was not likely to have a very amicable termination. At length, the voice of my uncle in a terrible state of excitement, burst forth with this awful sentence :

"I discard you, sir ! From this day you cease to be my son. Go, and take my curse along with you ! Go to — - ! and may we never meet in time or eternity again."

With a bitter, sneering laugh the disinherited replied. "In heaven we shall never meet ; on earth, perhaps, we may meet too soon. In the place to which you have so unceremoniously sent me, I can perceive some lingering remains of paternal affection—that where you are, I may be also."

"Hold your tongue, sir. Dare you to bandy words with me?"

"It would be wisdom in you, my most righteous progenitor, to bribe me to do so, when you know how much that tongue can reveal."

Another sneering derisive laugh from the son, of fiendish exultation, and a deep, hollow groan from the father, and the unhallowed conference was over.

Some one passed the door with rapid steps. I walked to the window as Theophilus emerged into the court-yard below. He raised his eyes to the window ; I met their dull, leaden stare ; he started and stopped ; I turned contemptuously away.

Presently after we heard him bargaining for a horse to carry him as far as York on his way to London.

"I don't envy Robert Moncton's feelings," said George. "What can have been the cause of this violent quarrel?"

"It may spring from several causes. His son's marriage alone would be sufficient to exasperate a man of his malignant disposition. But look, Harrison, the clouds are parting in the west. The moon rises early, and we shall have a lovely night after the rain for our journey to York."

"Our—I was going by the coach which passes through the village in an hour to Elm Grove. But now I think of it, I will postpone my visit until the morrow, and accompany you a few miles on your way."

"I should be delighted with your company, George, but"—

"You would rather be alone, nursing these gloomy thoughts?"

"Not exactly. But it will postpone your visit to Miss Lee."

"Only a few hours ; and as I wrote yesterday and never

mentioned my visit, which was a sudden whim—one of your *odd* presentiments, Geoffrey, which seemed to compel me almost against my will to come here—she cannot be disappointed. To tell you the truth, I did not like the look with which your cousin recognized you. When rogues are abroad it behoves honest men to keep close together. I am determined to see you safe to York.”

I was too much pleased with the proposal to raise any obstacles in the way. We fell into cheerful conversation, and whilst watching the clearing up of the weather, we saw Robert Moncton mount his horse and ride out of the Inn-yard.

“The sun is breaking through the clouds, George. It is time we were upon the road.”

“With all my heart,” said he ; and a few minutes after we were upon our journey.

The freshness of the air after the heavy rains, the delicious perfume of the hedge-rows, and the loud clear notes of the black-bird resounding from the bosky dells in the lordly plantations skirting the road, succeeded in restoring my animal spirits.

Nothing could exceed the tranquillity of the lovely evening. George often checked his horse and broke out into enthusiastic exclamations of delight whilst pointing out to me the leading features in the beautiful country through which we were travelling.

“Where are your gloomy forebodings now, Geoffrey?”

“This glorious scene has well-nigh banished them. Nature has always such an exhilarating effect upon my mind that I can hardly feel miserable while the sun shines.”

George turned towards me his kindling eyes and animated countenance.

“Geoffrey, I have not felt so happy as I do this evening, since I was a little, gay, light-hearted boy. I could sing aloud in the joyousness of hope and pleasing anticipation. In this

respect my feelings during the day have been quite the opposite of yours. I reproach myself for not being able to sympathize in your nervously depressed state of mind."

"Your being sad, George, would not increase my cheerfulness. The quiet serenity of the hour has operated upon me like a healing balm. I can smile at my superstitious fears, now that the dark cloud is clearing from my mind."

Thus we rode on, chatting with the familiarity of long-trying friendship, discussing our past trials, present feelings, and future prospects, until the moon rose brightly on our path; and we pushed our horses to a quicker pace, in order to reach the city before midnight.

The road we were travelling had been cut through a steep hill. The banks on either side were very high, and crowned with plantations of pine and fir, that cast into deep shadow the space between. The hill was terminated by a large deep gravel pit, through the centre of which our path lay—and the opposite rise of the hill, which was destitute of trees, lay gleaming brightly in the moonshine.

As we gained the wood-crowned height, we perceived a horseman slowly riding down the steep before us. His figure was so blended with the dark shadows of the descending road, that the clicking of his horse's hoofs, and the moving mass of deeper shade alone proclaimed his proximity.

"This is a gloomy spot, George. I wish we were fairly out of it."

"Afraid, Geoffrey—and two to one?"

"No, not exactly afraid; but this spot would be lonely at noonday. Look—look! George, what makes that man so suddenly check his horse as he gains the centre of the pit and emerges into the moonlight?"

"Silence!" cried George. "That was the report of a pistol. Follow me!"

We spurred our horses to full speed and galloped down the hill.

The robbers, if indeed any were near, had disappeared, and we found the man whom we had previously observed, rolling on the ground in great agony, and weltering in blood.

Dismounting from our horses, we ran immediately to his assistance. He raised his head as we approached, and said in a low hollow voice,—

“I am shot, I know the rascal, he cannot escape. Raise my head, I feel choking—a little higher. The wound may not be mortal, I may live to be revenged upon him yet.”

“The sound of that voice—the sight of those well-known features, rendered me powerless. I stood mute and motionless, staring upon the writhing and crushed wretch before me, unable to render him the least assistance.

It was my uncle who lay bleeding there, slain by some unknown hand. A horrible thought flashed through my brain; a ghastly sickness came over me and I stifled the unnatural supposition.

In the meanwhile Harrison had succeeded in raising Mr. Moncton into a sitting posture, and had partly ascertained the nature of his wound. Whilst thus employed, the moon shone full upon his face, and my uncle, uttering a cry of terror, fell prostrate on the ground, whilst the blood gushed in a dark stream from his wounded shoulder.

“Geoffrey,” and George beckoned me to come to him, “don’t stand shaking there like a person in an ague fit. Something must be done, and that immediately, or your uncle will die on the road. Mount the high bank, and see if you can discover any dwelling nigh at hand, to which he can be conveyed.”

His voice broke the horrid trance in which my senses were bound. I sprang up the steep side of the gravel pit, and saw before me a marshy meadow, and not far from the road, a light

glimmered from a cabin window. It was a wretched looking place, but the only habitation in sight, nearer than the village, whose church spire, about two miles distant, glimmered in the moonbeams. Turning our horses loose to graze in the meadow, we lifted a gate from the hinges, and placing the now insensible lawyer upon this rough litter, which we covered with our travelling cloaks, we succeeded with much difficulty, and after a considerable lapse of time, in reaching the miserable hovel.

On the approach of footsteps, the persons within extinguished the light, and for some time we continued rapping at the door without receiving any answer.

I soon lost all patience, and began to hollo and shout in the hope of provoking attention.

Another long pause.

"Open the door," I cried, "a man has been shot on the road; he will die without assistance."

A window in the thatch slowly unclosed, and a hoarse female voice croaked forth in reply :

"What concern is that of mine? Who are you who disturb honest folk at this hour of the night with your drunken clamors? My house is my castle. Begone, I tell you! I will not come down to let you in."

"Dinah North," said Harrison, solemnly, "I have a message for you, which you dare not gainsay—I command you to unbar the door and receive us instantly."

This speech was answered by a wild shrill cry, more resembling the howl of a tortured dog than any human sound. I felt the blood freeze in my veins. Harrison whispered in my ear,—

"She will obey my summons, which she believes not one of earth. Stay with your uncle, while I ride forward to the village to procure medical aid, and make a deposition before the magistrate of what has occurred. Don't let the fiend know that I am

alive. It is of the utmost importance to us all, that she should still believe me dead."

I tried to detain him, not much liking my present position; but he had vanished, and shortly after I heard the clatter of his horse's hoofs galloping at full speed towards the town.

What a fearful termination of my gloomy presentiments, thought I, as I looked down at the livid face and prostrate form of Robert Moncton.

"Where will this frightful scene end?"

The gleam of a light flashed across the broken casement; the next moment Dinah North stood before me.

"Geoffrey Moncton, is this you?" There was another voice that spoke to me—a voice from the grave. "Where is your companion?"

"I am alone with the dead," I said, pointing to the body. "Look there!"

She held up the light and bent over that insensible bleeding mass, and looked long, and I thought triumphantly, at the ghastly face of the accomplice in all her crimes. Then turning her hollow eyes on me, she said calmly:

"Did you murder him?"

"No, thank God, I am guiltless of his blood; but he seems to know the hand that dealt the blow."

"Ha, ha!" shrieked the hag, "my dream was true—my horrible dream. Even so, last night, I saw Robert Moncton weltering in his blood, and my poor Alice was wiping the death-damps from his brow; and I saw more—more, but it was a sight for the damned—a sight which cannot be repeated to mortal ears.

"Yes, Robert Moncton, it is all up with you; we have sinned together and must both drink of that fiery cup. I know the worst now."

"Hush! he moves—he still lives. He may yet recover. Let us carry him into the house."

"He has troubled the earth and your father's house long enough, Geoffrey Moncton," said the strange woman, in a softened, and I thought, melancholy tone. "It is time that both he and I received the reward of our misdeeds."

She assisted me to carry the body into the house, and stripping off the clothes, we laid it upon a low flock bed, which occupied one corner of the miserable apartment, over which she threw a coarse woollen coverlid.

She then examined the wound with a critical eye, and after washing it with brandy she said that the ball could be extracted, and she thought that the wound was not mortal and might be cured.

Tearing his neckcloth into bandages, she succeeded in staunching the blood, and diluting some of the brandy with water, she washed the face of the wounded man, and forced a few spoonfuls down his throat.

Drawing a long, deep sigh, Robert Moncton unclosed his eyes. For some minutes they rested unconsciously upon us. Recollection slowly returned, and recoiling from the touch of that abhorrent woman, he closed them again and groaned heavily.

"We have met, Robert, in an evil hour. The friendship of the wicked brings no comfort in the hour of death or in the day of judgment."

"Avaunt, witch! The sight of your hideous face is worse than the pangs of death. Death," he repeated slowly—"I am not near death—I will not die—I cannot die."

"You dare not!" said Dinah, in a low, malignant whisper.

"Is this cowardly dastard the proud, wealthy Robert Moncton, who thought to build up his house by murder and treachery? Methinks this is a noble apartment and a fitting couch for the body of Sir Robert Moncton to lie in state."

"Mocking fiend! what pleasure can you find in my misery?"

"Much, much—oh, how much. It is not fair that I should

bear the tortures of the damned alone. Since the death of the only thing I ever loved I have had strange thoughts and terrible visions ; restless, burning nights and fearful days. But I cannot repent or wish undone that which is done. I can neither weep nor pray ; I can only curse—bitterly curse thee and thine. I rejoice to see this hour—to know that before I depart to your Master and mine, the vengeance of my soul will be satisfied.”

“Geoffrey, I implore you to drive that beldame from the room. The sight of her hideous face and her ominous croaking will drive me mad.”

“Uncle, do not exhaust your strength by answering her. She is not in her right senses. In a few minutes my friend will return with surgical aid, and we will get you removed to more comfortable lodgings in the village.”

“Do not deceive yourselves,” returned Dinah ; “from the bed on which he now lies, the robber and murderer will never rise again. As he has sown, so must he reap. He deserves small kindness at your hands, Geoffrey Moncton. You should rather rejoice that the sting of the serpent is drawn, and that he can hurt you and yours no more.”

“Alas !” returned I, taking the hand of the wretched sufferer in mine, “how much rather would I see him turn from his evil deeds, and live !”

“God bless you, Geoffrey !” sobbed forth my miserable uncle, bursting into tears ; perhaps the first he ever shed in his life. “Deeply have I sinned against you, noble, generous boy. Can you forgive me for my past cruelty ?”

“I can—I do ; and should it please God to restore you to health, I will prove the truth of what I say by deeds, not words. I assure you, uncle, I feel more anxious to save your soul from eternal misery, than to gain any advantage by your death.”

“Do not look so like your father, Geoffrey. His soul speaks

to me through your eyes. Your kindness heaps coals of fire upon my head. It would give me less torture to hear you curse than pray for me."

"Pray for yourself, uncle. I have never attended to these things as I ought to have done. I am punished now, when I have no word of comfort or instruction for you."

"Pray!" and he drew a long sigh. "My mother died when Ned and I were boys. We soon forgot the prayers she taught us. My father's God was Mammon. He taught me early to worship at the same shrine. No, Geoffrey, no—it is too late to pray. I feel—I know that I am lost. I have no part or lot in the Saviour—no love for God, in whom I never believed until this fatal hour.

"I have injured you, Geoffrey, and am willing to make all the reparation in my power by restoring you to those rights which I have labored so hard to set aside."

"Spare yourself, uncle, the painful relation. Let no thought on that score divert your mind from making its peace with God. Walters has returned, and the documents necessary to prove my legitimacy are in Sir Alexander's hands."

"Walters returned!" shrieked my uncle. "Both heaven and hell conspire against me. What a tale can he unfold."

"Ay, and what a sequel can I add to it," said Dinah, rising from her seat, and standing before him like one of the avenging furies. "Listen to me, Geoffrey Moncton, for it shall yet be told."

"Spare me, cruel woman, in mercy spare me. Is not your malice sufficiently gratified, so see me humbled to the dust?"

"Ah! if your villainy had proved successful, and you were revelling in wealth and splendor, instead of grovelling there beneath the lash of an awakened conscience, where would be your repentance?"

"What would *then* become of Geoffrey Moncton's claims to

legitimacy? I trow he would remain a bastard to the end of his days."

"Geoffrey, for God's sake bid that woman hold her venomous tongue. I feel faint and sick with her upbraidings."

"He is fainting," I said, turning to Dinah. "Allow him to die in peace."

"You are a fool to feel the least trouble about him," said Dinah. "There, he is again insensible; our efforts to bring him to his senses will only make matters worse. Listen to me, Geoffrey Moncton, I have a burden on my conscience I would fain remove, and which it is necessary that you should know. Remember what I told you when we last met. That the next time we saw each other, my secret and yours would be of equal value."

CHAPTER XXV.

DINAH'S CONFESSION.

"It is an ill wind, they say, Geoffrey Moncton, that blows no good to any one. Had the son of Sir Alexander Moncton lived, you would have retained your original insignificance. It is from my guilt that you derive a clear title to the lands and honors which by death he lost."

I know not why, but as she said this, a cold chill crept through me. I almost wished that she would leave the terrible tale she had to tell untold. I felt that whatever its import might be, that it boded me no good.

My situation was intensely exciting, and made me alive to the most superstitious impressions. It was altogether the most important epoch in my life.

Seated at the foot of that miserable bed, the ghastly face of the wounded man just revealed by the sickly light of a miserable candle, looked stark, rigid and ghost-like, to all outward appearance, already dead. And that horrible hag, with her witch-like face, with its grim smile, standing between me and the clear beams of the moon, that bathed in a silvery light the floor of that squalid room, and threw fantastic arabesques over the time-stained walls—glanced upon me like some foul visitant from the infernal abyss.

The hour was solemn midnight, when the dead are said to awake in their graves, and wander forth until the second crowing of the bird of dawn. I felt its mysterious influence steal over

my senses, and rob me of my usual courage, and I leant forward, to shut out the ghastly scene, and covered my face with my hands.

Every word that Dinah uttered fell upon my ear with terrible distinctness, as she continued her revelations of the past.

“My daughter, Rachel, by some strange fatality had won the regard of her delicate rival, Lady Moncton, who seemed to feel a perverse pleasure in loading her with favors. Whether she knew of the attachment that had existed between her and Sir Alexander is a secret. Perhaps she did not, and was only struck with the beauty and elegance of the huntsman’s wife—which was certainly very unusual in a person of her humble parentage. Be that as it may, she deemed her worthy of the highest trust that one woman can repose in another. The charge of her infant son, and that son the heir of a vast estate.

“Rachel was not insensible to the magnitude of the confidence reposed in her; and for the first six months of the infant’s life, she performed her duty conscientiously, and bestowed upon her nurse-child the most devoted care.

“Robert Moncton came to the Hall at this time to receive the rents of the estate for Sir Alexander—for he was his man of business. He saw the child, and perceived that it was a poor, fragile, puling thing; the thought entered his wicked heart, that if this weakly scion of the old family tree were removed his son would be heir to the title and lands of Moncton.

“I don’t know what argument he made use of to win Rachel to his purpose. I was living with him at the time as his house-keeper; for the wife he had married was a poor, feeble-minded creature—the mere puppet of his imperious will, and a very indifferent manager. But she loved him, and at that period he was a very handsome man, and had the art of hiding his tyrannical temper, by assuming before strangers a pleasing, dignified manner, which imposed on every person who was not acquainted with the secrets of the domestic prison-house.

“Rachel consented to make away with the child ; but on the very night she had set apart for the perpetration of the deed, God smote her own lovely boy upon the breast, and the tears of the distracted mother awoke in her mind a consciousness of the terrible sin she had premeditated.

“To hearts like Robert Moncton’s and mine this circumstance would not have deterred us from our purpose ; but Rachel was not like us, hardened in guilt or bad, and unknown to us both she reared the young heir of Moncton as her own.

“It was strange that neither of us suspected the fact.

“I might have known, from the natural antipathy I felt for the child, that he was not of my flesh and blood ; but God hid it from me, till Rachel informed me on her death-bed of the deception she had practised.

“It was an important secret, and I determined to make use of it to extort money from Robert Moncton, when the child should be old enough to attract his attention. I owed him a long grudge, and this gave me power to render him restless and miserable. Thus I suffered George Moncton to live, to obtain a two-fold object—the gratification of Avarice and Revenge.

“In spite of neglect and harsh treatment, which were inseparable from the deep-rooted hatred I bore him on his parents’ account, the hand of Heaven was extended over the injured child.

“He out-grew the feeble delicacy of his infancy, and when he had attained his fourth year, was a beautiful and intelligent boy.

“His father, as if compelled by powerful natural instinct, lavished upon him, the most abundant marks of favor. Lady Moncton’s love was that of a doting mother, which increased up to the period of her death.

“The death of Lady Moncton, and that of Roger Mornington, followed quickly upon each other, and all my old hopes revived,

when Sir Alexander renewed his attentions to my daughter. But vain are the expectations of the wicked. Bitter experience has taught me (though it took me a long life to learn that lesson) that man cannot contend with God—and my beautiful Rachel died in her prime, just when my fondest expectations seemed on the point of realization.

“Years fled on—years of burning disappointment and ungratified passion. The little girl Rachel left to my care was handsome, clever and affectionate, and I loved her with a fierce love, such as I never felt before for anything of earth—and she loved me—a creature from whose corrupted nature, all living things seemed to start with abhorrence.

“I watched narrowly the young heir of Moncton, who led that smiling rosebud by the hand, and loved her too, but not as I could have wished him to love her.

“Had I seen the least hope of his ever forming an attachment for his beautiful playmate, how different would have been my conduct towards him.

“Alice, was early made acquainted with the secret of his birth, and was encouraged by me, to use every innocent blandishment towards him, and even to hint that he was not her brother, in order to awaken a tenderer passion in his breast.

“His heart remained as cold as ice. His affections for Alice never exceeded the obligations of nature, due to her as his sister. They were not formed for each other and, again disappointed in my ambitious hopes, I vowed his destruction.

“At this time Sir Alexander sent him to school at York, and the man who lies grovelling on that bed, was made acquainted with his existence.”

A heavy groan, from Robert Moncton, interrupted for a few minutes the old woman's narrative. She rose from her seat, took the lamp from the table, and bending over the sorry couch, regarded the rigid marble features of my uncle, with the same

keen scrutiny, that she had looked upon me in the garret of the old house in Hatton Garden.

"It was but a passing pang," she said, resuming her seat. "His ear is closed to all intelligible sounds."

I thought otherwise, but after rocking herself to and fro on her seat for a short space, she again fixed upon me her dark, searching, fiery eyes, and resumed her tale.

"Robert Moncton bore the intelligence with more temper than I expected. Nor did he then propose any act of open violence towards the innocent object of our mutual hatred—but determined to destroy him in a more deliberate and less dangerous way. At that time I was not myself eager for his death, for my poor deluded, lost Alice, had not then formed the ill-fated attachment to Theophilus Moncton, which terminated in her broken heart and early grave—and which, in fact, has proved the destruction of all, and rendered the house of the destroyer as desolate as my own.

"At first I could not believe that the attachment of my poor girl to Theophilus was sincere, but when I was at length convinced that both were in earnest, my long withered hopes revived. I saw her in idea, already mistress of the Hall, and often in private called her Lady Moncton.

"I despised the surly wretch, whom, unfortunately, she only loved too well, and looked upon his union with my grandchild as a necessary evil, through which she could alone reach the summit of my ambitious wishes.

"In the meanwhile, Alice played her cards so well that she and her lover were privately married—she binding herself, by a solemn promise, not to divulge the secret, even to me, until a fitting opportunity.

"After a few months, her situation attracted my attention. I accused her of having been betrayed by her fashionable paramour.

"She denied the charge—was obstinate and violent, and much bitter language passed between us.

Just at this period, young Mornington returned to us, a ruined man. He fell sick, and both Alice and myself hoped that his disease would terminate fatally. In this we were disappointed. He slowly and surely recovered in spite of our coldness and neglect.

"Before he was able to leave his bed, Robert Moncton, who had discovered his victim's retreat, paid us a visit. *Me*, he cajoled, by promising to give his consent to his son's marriage with Alice, but only on condition of our uniting to rid him for ever of the man who stood between him and the long-coveted estates and title of Moncton.

"*I*, for my part, was easily entreated, for our interests were too closely united in his destruction, for me to raise any objections.

"Alice, however, was a novice in crime, and she resisted his arguments with many tears, and it was not until he threatened to disinherit her husband, if he ever dared to speak to her again, that she reluctantly consented to administer the fatal draught that Robert prepared with his own hands."

There was a long pause, I thought I heard the sound of horses' hoofs in the distance. Dinah heard it too, and hastened to conclude her narrative.

"Yes, George Moncton died in the bloom of life, the victim of treachery from the very morning of his days. But the cry of the innocent blood has gone up to the throne of God, and terrible vengeance has pursued his murderers.

"When I discovered that Alice was the lawful wife of Theophilus Moncton, and that the child she carried, if it proved a son, would be Sir Alexander's heir, I made a journey to London, to communicate the fact to Robert Moncton, and to force him to acknowledge her publicly as his daughter-in-law.

"He would not believe me on my oath—and declared that it

was only another method to extort money. I produced the proofs. He vowed that they were base forgeries, and tore the documents, trampling them under his feet—and it was only when I threatened to expose the murder of his cousin, that he condescended to listen to reason.

“It was then, for the first time, I heard of your existence, and a new and unforeseen enemy, seemed to start up and defy me to my teeth.

“Robert Moncton laughed at my fears, and told me how ingeniously he had contrived to brand you with the stigma of illegitimacy.

“He could not however lull my fears to rest, until I was satisfied that Walters had really placed the stolen certificates in the iron chest in your garret—and late as it was, we went to assure ourselves of the fact.”

“Oh, how well I remember that dreadful visit,” said I—“and the horrible dream that preceded it.”

“You were awake, then?”

“Yes—awake with my eyes shut—and heard all that passed.”

“A true Moncton,” and she shook her palsied head. “The devil is in you all. You know then, that our search was fruitless, and I returned to Moncton with the conviction, that we were destined to be defeated in our machinations.

“Six months after these events, Alice gave birth to a son, and was greatly cheered by the news, which reached her through one of the servants at the Hall, that her husband had returned from Italy, and was in London.”

“The rest of her melancholy history is known to me,” said I. “It was my arm that lifted her from the water when she attempted to destroy herself. Oh, miserable and guilty woman, what have you gained by all your deep-laid schemes of villainy? As to you, Dinah North, the gibbet awaits you—and your prospects beyond the grave are more terrible still.”

"Dinah North will never die beneath the gaze of an insolent mob," said the old woman, with a sullen laugh. "A few months ago, Geoffrey Moncton, and I would have suffered the rack, before I would have confessed to you aught that might render you a service, but the kindness you showed to my unhappy grandchild—awoke in my breast a feeling towards you foreign to my nature, I have been a terrible enemy to your house. But *you*, at least, should regard me as a friend. Had George Moncton lived, what would become of your claims to rank and fortune?"

"Dinah, he does live!" and the conviction that I was penniless—a poor dependent upon a noble house, instead of being the expectant heir, pressed at that moment painfully on my heart. "See," I continued, as the door opened, and George attended by several persons entered the house, "he is here to assert his lawful claims. The grave has given up its dead."

The same wild shriek that burst so frightfully on my ears, when George first addressed the old woman, rang through the apartment.

"Constables, do your duty," said George. "Instantly secure that woman."

As he spoke, the light was suddenly extinguished, and we were left in darkness. Before the hurry and bustle of re-kindling it was over, Dinah North had disappeared, and all search after her proved fruitless.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE.

ROBERT MONCTON had lain in a stupor for the last hour. The surgeon whom George had brought with him from the village, after carefully examining the wound, to my surprise, declared that it was mortal, and that the sufferer could not be removed, as his life must terminate in a few hours.

During the extraction of the bullet and the dressing of the wound, Robert Moncton recovered his senses and self-possession, and heard his doom with a glassy gaze of fixed despair.

Then, with a deep sigh, he asked if a lawyer were present, as he wished to make his will, and set his affairs in order before he died.

George had brought with him a professional gentleman, the clergyman, and one of the chief magistrates in the village. He now introduced to his notice the Rev. Mr. Chapman, and Mr. Blake, the solicitor.

"When I require your offices," he said, addressing the former gentleman, "I will send for you. Such comfort as you can give in the last hour, will not atone for the sins of a long life. This is one of the fallacies to which men cling when they can no longer help themselves. They will, however, find it a broken reed when called upon to pass through the dark valley.

"With you, sir," shaking hands with Mr. Blake, "my business lies. Clear the room till this matter is settled; I wish us to be alone"

The clergyman mounted his horse and rode away in high dudgeon. George and I gladly availed ourselves of the opportunity of leaving for a while the gloomy chamber of death, and taking a turn in the fresh air.

We wandered forth into the clear night ; the blessed and benignant aspect of nature forming, as it ever does, a solemn, holy contrast with the turbulent, restless spirit of man. Nature has her storms and awful convulsions, but the fruits are fertility, abundance, rest. The fruits of our malignant passions — sin, disease, mental and physical death.

My blighted prospects, in spite of all my boasted disinterestedness, weighed heavily on my heart. I tried to rejoice in my friend's good fortune, but human nature with all its sins and weaknesses prevailed. I was not then a Christian, and could scarcely be expected to prefer the good of my neighbor to my own.

Bowed down and humbled by the consciousness of all I had lost, I should, had I been alone, have shamed my manhood, and found relief in tears.

"Dear Geoffrey, why so silent?" and George wrung my hand with his usual warmth. "Have you no word for your friend. This night has been one of severe trial. God knows how deeply I sympathize in your feelings. But cheer up, my dear fellow ; better and brighter moments are at hand."

"No, no, not for me," returned I, almost choking. "I am one of the unlucky ones ; no good can ever happen to me. My hopes and prospects are blighted for ever. It is only you, George Moncton, who, in this dark hour, have reason to rejoice."

He stopped and grasped my arm. "What do you mean, Geoffrey, when you call me by that name?"

"That it belongs to you."

"To me ! Has Dinah made any confession?"

"She has. Have a little patience, George, till I can collect my scattered thoughts, and tell you all."

I then communicated to him the conversation that had passed between Dinah and myself, though my voice often trembled with emotion, and I could scarcely repress my tears.

He heard me silently to the end; then flinging his arms about my neck, he pressed me closely to his heart, and we wept together.

"Ah, Geoffrey, my cousin, my more than brother and friend," he said at last, "how gladly would I confer upon you, if it would increase your comfort and happiness, the envied wealth that has been the fruitful cause of such revolting crimes.

"Ah, mother!" he continued, looking up to the calm heavens, and raising his hands in a sort of ecstasy, "dear, sainted, angel mother, whom, as a child, I recognized and loved, it is only on your account that I rejoice—yes, with joy unspeakable, that I am indeed your son—that the boy you adored and fondly cherished was the child you sought in heaven, and wept on earth as lost. And that fine, generous, noble-hearted old man—how proud I shall feel to call him father, and recall all his acts of kindness to me when a nameless orphan boy. And Margaretta, my gentle sister—my best and earliest friend. Forgive me, dear Geoffrey, if thoughts like these render me happy in spite of myself. I only wish that you could participate in the fullness of my joy."

"I will—I do!" I exclaimed, ashamed of my past regrets. "The evil spirit of envy, George, cast a dark shadow over the sunshine of my heart. This will soon yield to better feelings. You know me to be a faulty creature of old, and must pity and excuse my weakness."

Unconsciously we had strolled to the top of a wild, heathery common, which overlooked the marshy meadows below, and was covered with dwarf oaks and elder bushes.

Though close upon day-break, the moon was still bright, and I thought I discerned something which resembled the sharp outline of a human figure, suspended from the lower branch of a gnarled and leafless tree, the long hair and garments fluttering loosely in the wind.

With silent horror I pointed it out to my companion. We both ran forward and soon reached the spot.

Here, between us and the full, broad light of the moon, hung the skeleton-like figure of Dinah North ; her hideous countenance rendered doubly so by the nature of her death.

Her long grey hair streamed back from her narrow contracted brow ; her eyes wide open and staring, caught a gleam from the moon that heightened the malignant expression which had made them terrible to the beholder while in life.

We neither spoke, but looked at each other with eyes full of horror.

George sprang up the tree and cut down the body, which fell at my feet with a dull, heavy sound.

"She has but anticipated her fate, Geoffrey. Surely the hand of God is here."

"Miserable woman !" I said, as I turned with a shudder from the livid corpse—"is this the end of all your ambitious hopes ? Your life a tissue of revolting crimes—your end despair."

We hurried back to the cottage to give the alarm, and found Robert Moncton awake and in his senses, though evidently sinking fast.

"Dinah North dead !" he said, "and by her own voluntary act. This is retributive justice. She has been my evil genius on earth, and has gone before me to our appointed place.

"Geoffrey Moncton, I have a few words to say to you before I follow on her track.

"I have injured you during my life. I have however, done you justice now. I have made you my heir ; the sole inheritor of the large fortune I have bartered my soul to realize."

"But, uncle, you have a son."

His face grew dark as night.

"None that I acknowledge as such. And mark me, Geoffrey—he compressed his lips firmly and grasped my hand tightly as he spoke—I have left you this property on one condition—that you never bequeath or share one copper of it with that rascal Theophilus Moncton, for in such case it will benefit neither party, but will revert to your cousin, Margaretta Moncton. Do you hear?" and he shook me vehemently.

"And what will become of Theophilus?"

He laughed bitterly.

"He will yet meet with his deserts. What I have done may seem harsh to you, Geoffrey, but it is strictly just. My reasons for so doing may puzzle the world and astonish professional men, but it is a secret which never will be known until I meet the human monster, who calls himself my son, at the eternal bar. And may the curse of the great Judge of all flesh, and my curse, cleave to him for ever."

I shrank back from him with feelings of disgust and horror, which I took no pains to conceal; but it was unnoticed by him. The hand relaxed its rigid grasp, the large icy eyes lost the glittering brilliancy that had marked them through life, the jaw fell, and the soul of Robert Moncton passed forth from those open portals to its drear and dread account.

"He is dead," said the lawyer.

I drew a long sigh.

"How did he come to his death, young gentleman!"

"He was shot from behind the hedge, as he rode through the pit at the end of the long plantation. He said, when we first found him, that he knew the person who shot him."

"He admitted the same thing to me, but would not mention the name of the assassin. I have my own suspicions."

I had mine, but I did not wish to hint at the probability of

a fact that Robert Moncton had purposely, I have no doubt, left unrevealed. The cause of his death, and the hand that perpetrated the deed have never been discovered, but will remain open to conjecture as long as those live who feel the least interest in the subject. It was supposed, that important information could be obtained from his son, which might throw some light upon the mystery, but he had disappeared, and no trace of his whereabouts could be discovered.

We were detained for several days at the village whilst the coroner's inquest sat on the bodies, and we had made a statement before the proper authorities of all we knew about this mysterious affair.

Before three days were at an end, the public journals were filled with accounts of the awful tragedy that had occurred at the village of —, in Yorkshire; and the great talents and moral worth of the murdered lawyer were spoken of in terms of the highest praise, which certainly astonished his relations, and would have astonished himself. The only stain on his character, the extraordinary manner in which he had disinherited his only son, in order to place a *poor relation* who had been brought up in his house, in his shoes. It was evident to all, the part this domestic sneak must have acted in the dreadful tragedy to ensure the property to himself.

Hints of a darker nature were thrown out, which deeply wounded my sensitive pride, and which drew a reply from Mr. Blake, who stated, that Mr. Moncton told him that the murderer was well known to him, but he never would reveal to any one who or what he was. That he left young Geoffrey Moncton and George at the inn, and they did not come up until after he was shot. That the assassin did not attempt to conceal himself, but exchanged words with him and met him face to face.

I had just taken up my pen to add my testimony to that of the worthy Mr. Blake, when the door of the room suddenly

opened, and Sir Alexander and his lovely daughter, banished all other objects from my brain.

What an overflowing of eyes and hearts succeeded that unexpected meeting. How I envied George the hearty embrace with which the fine old man received his newly recovered son. The tearful joy that beamed in the dark eloquent eyes of his delighted sister as she flung herself with unrestrained freedom into the arms of that long-cherished friend, and now beloved brother.

My welcome was not wanting either—Sir Alexander received me as another son, and my own, my lovely Madge as something dearer to her than even a brother.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DOUBLE BRIDAL.

THE first excitement of our meeting over, I was painfully struck with the great alteration that the absence of a few weeks had made in the face of Margaret.

Her eyes, always beautiful, now gleamed with an unnatural brilliancy ; and her pure, pale complexion, at times was flushed with a hectic glow, which, contrasting with the dazzling white teeth and jet-black hair, gave a fearful beauty to her charming face.

I took her hand in mine. It burned with fever.

"Dear Margaret, are you ill?"

She raised her eyes to mine, swimming in tears.

"Not ill, Geoffrey ; only a little weak."

"No wonder, when you are in such a state of emaciation. You ought not to have let the death of Alice bring you so low as this."

"Your absence and long silence, dear Geoffrey, have had more to do with my poor health than the death of my unfortunate friend."

"How so, dearest?"

"Torturing anxiety, sleepless nights, and days of weeping would produce this change in stronger frames than mine. But that is all past. I am quite well and happy now, and Margaret will soon be herself again."

This was accompanied by such a sad, moonlight smile, that it

only served to increase my fears. I inquired earnestly if her father had consulted a medical man.

"Oh, yes—a dozen, at least."

"And what opinion did they give?"

"They told the plain truth. Said that my illness was produced by mental excitement. That change of air and scene would soon bring me round."

I felt that I looked grave and sad. She put her arm round my shoulder, and whispered in my ear: "You are mine, Geoffrey, and I shall soon get well in the society of those I love; so banish that gloomy frown, and try to participate in the general joy."

"I have procured an excellent flute for you, as a little present. You shall play, and I will sing, and Kate Lee (of whom I am no longer jealous) and George shall dance, and papa shall smoke his cigar beneath our favorite old tree and enjoy the fun, and we shall all be so happy."

Thus did my poor, fading, white rose strive to divert my thoughts into a brighter channel; and hope, ever attendant upon the young, cheated me into the belief that all would yet be well.

Instead of returning to Moncton Park, George proposed our accompanying him to Elm Grove. Sir Alexander thought the change would be beneficial to Margaretta, and we joyfully accepted his proposal.

I exchanged my horse with Sir Alexander, and took his place beside Madge in the open carriage. The good Baronet rode with his son, who had a thousand revelations of his past life to communicate to his delighted father.

Madge and I were not without our histories and confessions; and long before we entered the avenue that led to Elm Grove, the dear girl had promised to become my wife, when returning health should remove the last barrier to our union.

Our reception at Elm Grove was such as might have been expected from its amiable possessors.

Accounts of Robert Moncton's and Dinah North's death had travelled there before us, and formed, for the first few days, the theme of general discussion. My kind friend, Mrs Hepburn, warmly congratulated me on my accession of fortune, and Dan Simpson was almost beside himself with joy. Though I could no longer regard myself as Sir Alexander's successor, I found myself not a whit inferior in wealth and importance.

Sir Alexander received my proposal for his daughter with unfeigned satisfaction. He wrung my hand with hearty goodwill. "Two sons, my dear Geoff. God has given me two sons in return for depriving me of one of them for so many years. Faith, my dear boy, I hardly know which of you is dearest to the old man. Madge, however, has found out which of the twain she loves best. I shall resign the Hall to George and his pretty bride, and will come and live with my dear girl and my adopted son—hey, Madge! will you give the old man an easy place by your fire-side?"

Margaret threw herself into his extended arms, parted the white wavy locks from his high forehead, and devoutly kissed it.

Thus did we suffer hope to weave bright garlands for the future, without reflecting how soon the freshest flowers of earth are withered and scattered in the dust.

Cheered by the society and sympathy of her new friends, with a devoted lover ever at her side, Margaretta regained much of her former health and cheerfulness.

Hand in hand we roamed among the Derby hills, and visited every romantic spot in the neighborhood—not forgetting the old parsonage where my mother was born—the spot where my good old grandfather was buried—the little inn over which Mrs. Archer presided, who was infinitely delighted with seeing me

again, and hearing me introduce her lovely boy to Margaretta's especial notice.

Kate Lee did the honors of the house with the most bewitching grace, and she and Margaretta formed the most lively attachment to each other.

"Is she not beautiful, Geoffrey?" said Margaretta, as we sat together on the lawn beneath the shade of a large ash; and she watched her friend as she bounded past us down the grassy slope, to join Sir Alexander and his son in their evening walk.

"Yes, very beautiful, Madge."

"Don't you envy George the possession of such a charming wife?"

"I love George and admire his Kate, but I would not exchange my little fairy," and I pressed her fondly to my heart, "for his stately queen."

"Ah, flatterer, how can I believe you, who would prefer the pale, drooping snow-drop to the perfumed, glowing rose?"

"Let George keep his rose—the peerless among many sweets—but give me the pure solitary gem of early spring, which cheers with its modest grace the parting frowns of envious winter."

I pressed her small white hand with fervor to my lips and heart. The meek head of the gentle girl sunk drooping on my bosom. The long black lashes that veiled her matchless eyes were heavy with large bright tears.

"Why do you weep, sweet Madge?"

"I am too happy. These are tears of joy; they relieve the fullness of my heart. After suffering so much bitter grief it is a luxury to weep in the arms of the beloved."

How often have I recalled those words when weeping in madness on her grave, and found no joy in grief—no peace in my distracted heart.

The harvest had been gathered in, and the ripe autumnal

fruits hung heavily on the loaded trees when we returned to Moncton Park. The first of October had been named for the celebration of our double nuptials, and all was bustle and activity at the Hall, in making the necessary preparations for the important event. Margaretta appeared to take as much interest in the matrimonial arrangements as her lively friend, Kate.

Not a ribbon was selected or a dress purchased, but George and I were called to give our opinion of its beauty or becomingness; whilst the good old Baronet's whole time and attention were directed to the improvements and decorations which he had planned in the interior of the Hall.

Thus all went merry as a marriage bell until the second week in September, which was ushered in by heavy gales and frequent showers.

Often, when returning from our accustomed rides and walks, Margaret would draw her shawl tightly round her, and clinging closely to my arm, would complain that she was *cold—very cold*.

One day in particular, when the deceitful beauty of the morning had induced us to extend our ride a few miles farther than usual, we all got drenched by a sudden shower of rain. The next morning my dear girl complained of a pain in her chest, sudden chills and weariness of mind and body. These symptoms were succeeded by a short, hacking cough, and sudden flushings of the face, which greatly alarmed us all.

Medical advice was instantly called in, but Margaret's malady daily increased and her strength rapidly declined.

I dared not whisper to myself the fears that oppressed my heart, and was almost afraid of asking Dr. Wilson the nature of her complaint.

To my utter grief and despair he informed me that his patient was beyond human aid—that a few weeks, at the

farthest, would terminate the existence of the gentlest and purest of human beings.

"It would be cruel to deceive you, Mr. Moncton," he said, as he announced the startling truth—for the dreadful communication had quite unmanned me. "Let this comfort you in your affliction, that I have anticipated this for years—that our dear patient has carried about with her the seeds of this fatal malady from infancy—that it is better that she should thus fall in the budding season of youth, than leave hereafter a family of children to bewail their irreparable loss. I sorrow for her father and you, Mr. Geoffrey, more than for her. Death has few terrors to a sincere Christian, and such from childhood Margaret Moncton has been. A friend to the friendless—a sister of mercy to the poor and destitute."

Oh, reader! if you have ever known what it is to see your fondest hopes annihilated at the very moment of their apparent fulfillment, you can form some idea of my mental anguish whilst watching the decay of that delicate flower.

Margaret was now fully aware of her danger, a most uncommon circumstance in the victims of that insidious disease, on whom Death advances so softly that he always comes suddenly at last. She prepared herself to meet the mighty conqueror with a cheerful submission to the will of God, that surprised us all.

One thing she earnestly entreated, that the marriage of Catherine and George might not be postponed on account of her illness.

"I not only wish to witness their happiness before I go hence, but to share in it," she said to us, a few days before the one that had been appointed for the ceremony, as we were all sitting round the sofa on which she was reclining.

"And you, dearest Geoffrey, must give me a lawful claim to the tender care I receive from you. Though I can only be your

wife in name, I shall die happy in hearing you address me by that coveted appellation."

I could in reply only press her wasted form in my arms and bathe her hands and face with my tears. How earnestly had I wished to call her mine, though I lacked the courage to make the proposal so dear to my peace.

Oh, what a melancholy day was that to us all. Margaret's sweet face alone wore a serene smile, as, supported by her father, she stood beside me at the altar.

How beautiful she looked in her white bridal dress. What a mockery was the ceremony to my tortured heart, whilst fancy, busy with my grief, converted those flowing garments into a snowy shroud.

One little week after that melancholy event I again bent before that altar, to partake of the last tokens of a Saviour's dying love ; but I knelt alone. The grave had closed over my bright, my beautiful, my virgin bride, and my soul had vowed an eternal divorce from the vanities and lusts of earth.

* * * * *

Years have fled on in their silent and undeviating course. I am now an old, grey-headed man.

Sir Alexander Moncton has long been gathered to his fathers, and the old Hall is filled by a race of healthy, noble-looking young people, the children of Sir George Moncton and Catherine Lee.

I, too, have a Geoffrey and a Margaret, the children of my adoption, for out of a large family Sir George willingly spared me these.

For years I have resided at the Lodge, formerly the residence of Dinah North, which I have converted into a pretty dwelling, surrounded by shrubberies and flower-gardens.

I love to linger near the scenes where the happiest and saddest moments of my life were passed.

Behold me now — a cheerful and contented old man, surrounded by dear young faces, who lavish upon Uncle Geoffrey the redundant affections of warm and guileless hearts.

My wealth is the means of making many happy—of obviating the sorrows of the sorrowful, and smoothing with necessary comforts the couch of pain.

When I first lost my beloved Margaret, I mourned as one without hope ; but it pleased God to hallow and bless my afflictions, and by their instrumentality, gently to lead me to a knowledge of the truth—that simple and holy truth, which has set me free from the chains of sin and the fear of death.

In what a different light I view all these trials now. How sincerely I can bless the munificent hand that wounds but to seal—punishes but to reform—who has poured upon the darkness of my soul the light of life, and exchanged the love of earth, which bound me grovelling in the dust, for the love of Christ—sorrow for the loss of one dear companion and friend, into compassion for the sorrows and sufferings of the whole human race.

* * * * *

A few words more, gentle reader, and we part for ever. These relate to the fate of Theophilus Moncton, and fully illustrate the awful text—"There is no peace," saith my God, "for the wicked"—and again—"The wicked have no hope in their death."

From the hour that Robert Moncton fell by the hand of the unknown midnight assassin, Theophilus Moncton was never seen or heard of again for upwards of twenty years, until his name was forgotten, and I, like the rest of the world, believed that he was dead, or a voluntary exile in a foreign land.

One day, while crossing the Strand, just below Somerset

House, my charity was solicited by the dirty, ragged sweeper of the street.

The voice, though long unheard, was only too familiar to my ear, and looking earnestly at the suppliant, with mingled sensations of pity and horror, I recognized my long-lost cousin, Theophilus Moncton.

He, too, recognized me, and dropping the tattered remains of his hat at my feet, muttered half aloud :

“Do not betray me, Geoffrey ; I am a lost and miserable man. My punishment is already greater than flesh and blood can well bear.”

“What assistance can I render you ?” I asked, in a faltering voice, as I dropped my purse into his hat, for the sight of him recalled many painful recollections.

“You have rendered me the best in your power ;” and flinging away his broom, he disappeared down a dirty, narrow alley, leaving me in a state of doubt and anxiety concerning him.

Wishing to convert this sinner from the error of his ways, and to elucidate, if possible, the mystery which involved his father’s death, I repaired to the same place for several days in the hope of meeting with him again, but without success.

A week elapsed, and I found another tattered son of want supplying his place at the crossing of the street. Dropping a shilling into his extended hand, I asked what had become of the poor fellow that used to sweep there.

“Saving your honor’s presence,” returned the mendicant, in a broad Irish accent, “he was a big blackguard, and so he was, not over-honest neither, and always drunk. T’other day, some foolish body who had more money nor wit, took a fancy to his ugly, unwholesome phiz., and gave him a purseful of gould—or mayhap he stole it—an’ he never quits the grip of the brandy bottle till he dies. They carried the body to the poor-house,

and that's all I knows of the chap. 'Tis a lucky thing, yer honor, that the scamp has neither wife nor child."

I thought so, too, as with a heavy sigh I took my way to the inn, murmuring to myself as I walked along :

"And such is the end of the wicked."

THE END.

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